# RALPH SINCLAIR'S ATONEMENT

Title: Ralph Sinclair's Atonement

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Release Date: August 17, 2015 [eBook #49727]

Language: English



Produced by Al Haines.

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*"I THINK YOU HAVE COME TO A VERY SENSIBLE CONCLUSION." (See page 239)*

# RALPH SINCLAIR'S ATONEMENT

BY
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LONDON:
ANDREW MELROSE
16 PILGRIM STREET, E.C.
1903

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# RALPH SINCLAIR'S ATONEMENT

## CHAPTER I.

### A BOLT FROM THE BLUE.

"Better men fared thus before thee."—MATTHEW ARNOLD.

"Is Mr. Houghton in?"

"Yes, sir. Who shall I say has called?"

"Please say that Mr. Johnson, with a letter of introduction from your works at Broadstone, would like to see him."

The clerk addressed hastened away to an inner office to convey the message to his principal, returning shortly with a request, "Will you please to walk this way."

The office into which he was conducted was a portion of a large and very handsome showroom in the West End of London, screened from general observation by a wood-and-glass erection, which formed a separate room, in which

was seated the manager of the firm of H. & E. Quinion, so well known for their famous Metal Works in the Midlands, but whose chief transactions were carried on by means of their London and Sydney houses.

Mr. Houghton, who rose on the entry of his visitor, was a tall portly specimen of the English gentleman. The kindly expression of his countenance, and general affable manners, were in marked contrast to the little man who proceeded to introduce himself by presenting the letter already referred to. Apparently about thirty-five years of age; dark complexion; with deep-set ferret-like eyes, partially concealed by a pair of pince-nez; dark-brown short-cropped hair, thin on the top; clean shaven cheeks, but a heavy cavalry moustache; and a stooping gait,—he had all the appearance of one who had lived "fast," and missed his mark in life's struggle for existence.

After a second perusal of the letter presented,—which, to judge by the expression of his countenance, had come upon him as a surprise, and did not seem to please him,—he turned to his interviewer and remarked, somewhat absently, as if he scarcely knew what to say, "I think the best thing I can do is to introduce you to the clerks and staff generally, for which purpose, if you will excuse me for a few moments, I will go and prepare them."

"Very well," was all the reply the other made, as Mr. Houghton, without another word, left the office.

Calling a clerk named Kenway, who happened to be passing, and who was distantly related to him, he hastily directed him to summon the other clerks to meet him at once in his office. Full of curiosity, and a-tiptoe with expectation as to what was impending, there was soon assembled an anxious and eager group of men, quietly canvassing the possibilities and probabilities of the situation.

On the entrance of Mr. Houghton it was at once seen that something unusual had occurred, as he appeared to be very much agitated, and to have lost command of that calmness and ease which it was his general habit to assume. With manifest anxiety to get through an unpleasant task with the least possible delay he advanced, and, leaning heavily upon his desk, said—

"Gentlemen, I have had you called together thus hurriedly, because I thought it only right that you should hear the fact from my own lips that I am intending shortly to resign my position here as manager."

A half-suppressed murmur of regret went round the assembled clerks, which was, however, allowed to pass unnoticed, as, scarcely able to restrain the tears which filled his eyes, and in an all but inaudible voice, he continued—

"Yes; after serving the firm for upwards of fifty years, it is with their approval that I shall in six months retire, and endeavour to take life a little easier. I have to thank you all for the assistance you have always rendered me; and, in bidding you farewell, I propose to introduce you to my successor, who is now

here with a letter of introduction from Broadstone."

Only half realising what they had just heard, one or two managed to give expression to their sincere regret at the intelligence so abruptly conveyed, together with the earnest hope that he would long live to enjoy the rest and ease he was looking forward to, and had so well earned, when they were again left alone to separate, and speculate upon what had been so suddenly communicated.

On returning to the office in which he had left his visitor, all traces of the emotion so recently evinced had disappeared from Mr. Houghton's face, and he proceeded to discuss the situation, and to unfold the working of the business with his usual calmness and clearness.

But the contemplated interview with the employés of the establishment was for the present declined by his visitor, under the pretence that, being so new to everything and everybody, he was not quite prepared for such an ordeal as that would seem to involve. On taking his leave, soon after, it was with the promise that he would pay a further visit very shortly.

The news, which spread throughout the "house," created no little consternation; whilst everywhere and by everyone it was received with the most unqualified expressions of regret, Mr. Houghton being a man held in universal esteem by all who knew him.

As opportunity offered, throughout the remainder of the day, little groups were to be observed in the various departments, discussing the *pros* and *cons* of an event which might mean so much to all in the employ of the firm.

Roberts, who had been a servant for a long series of years, and occupied a position second only to that held by Mr. Houghton, was very decided in the expression of his views in a conversation subsequently held with Arnold, who regarded himself as an expert in his own particular department.

"I don't believe," said Roberts, "that this so-called retirement is the voluntary act of Mr. Houghton."

"How then," said Arnold, "do you consider it has come about?"

"It appears to me to have been forced upon him."

"Don't you think he knew that Mr. Johnson was coming?"

"No, I do not; that, I think, was as much a surprise to himself as it was to us."

"Well," added Arnold, "if the emotion he manifested may be taken as evidence, he seemed to be quite unmanned, and very ill-prepared for what he wished to say."

"Yes; and to my thinking," said Roberts, "no clearer proof is needed than the fact of his resignation being only made known to us when his successor was in the house. Had he been aware of what was impending, I have no hesitation in saying he would have prepared himself for the issue, and informed us of it in a

more leisurely and self-possessed manner."

"Rather rough treatment of a man who has been a trusted and respected servant for over fifty years!"

"No doubt of it," continued Roberts. "Of course, I do not say but what it is quite possible that the heads of the firm at Broadstone may have suggested to him the desirability of thinking of retiring, after such a lengthy innings, in order that some younger man should be introduced, who might be expected to impart a little fresh life and infuse more energy into the business; but, as he did not readily take the hint, I presume they have 'taken the bull by the horns,' which causes their act to have the appearance of somewhat unceremonious treatment."

In the warehouse, where the matter was very keenly discussed, similar views prevailed; and it was generally considered that Mr. Houghton was not retiring willingly, that the so-called retirement was too patent a sham to deceive anyone; and the verdict was that it was a very shabby way of treating an old and faithful servant; and that if the firm could behave in such an inconsiderate way to one who had devoted his life to the best interests of his employers' business, the prospect was not a very encouraging one for those who remained.

"The end justified the means" is much too frequently, and too generally, the rule of conduct with many large and wealthy firms, as it is with public companies, who have not a soul to be *cursed* (another word is more often used) or a body to be kicked.

## CHAPTER II.

### BROADSTONE.

"Preferment goes by letter and affection,
Not by the old gradation, when each second
Stood heir to the first."—*Othello*, Act I. sc. i.

Politically, as well as commercially, the town of Broadstone is "no mean city," and for light and leading has long been running our metropolitan capital very close. Its members loom large on the political horizon; whilst its industries are not only marketable commodities in the remotest regions of the world, but by their quality give the name of the place to the trade it does, although not often is it in most complimentary terms.

Its leading thoroughfares are broad and spacious, while its streets appear to

have been laid out on no well-defined or pre-arranged plan, but to have developed as circumstances seemed to render desirable.

The buildings have a twofold character; those which are modern are handsome, and in many cases have an imposing appearance. This is especially the case with its public buildings. The more ancient, as well as the poorer quarters of the city, are, for the most part, plain brick-and-tile compounds, without ornament or anything to recommend them save their utility, and not even this always.

In the centre of one of its leading thoroughfares stands the factory of H. & E. Quinion, a lofty and rectangular pile of buildings of comparatively modern construction, with little to attract the eye from an architectural point of view; but, within, the fittings and appointments are handsome, and, in some instances, of a costly nature, yet strictly in keeping with the character of the work to be seen.

On the day succeeding the events narrated in the previous chapter, soon after the dinner-bell had been rung,—which was the signal for all work to cease, as well as for those who lived near enough to hasten home to the midday meal, whilst others who elected to do so could assemble in a common room set apart for their special use,—a note was handed to the senior partner, Mr. H. Quinion, as he was seated in a small office in the centre of the works, informing him that Arnold from the London office was below, and would like to see him.

Surprised, and just a little annoyed at so unexpected a visit, he gave orders for him to be shown upstairs.

Arnold was a man of a quiet and reserved disposition, not regarded with much favour by his fellow-clerks, nor made a confidant of by any one in particular. It was generally felt—perhaps without sufficient reason—that he had long had his eyes upon the manager's position in London as a post he might one day be called upon to occupy. But whenever the subject was canvassed by the rest of the staff, it was invariably with a considerable amount of scoffing and ridicule at the idea of so unsuitable a man, in everyone's estimation but that of himself, aspiring to so responsible an appointment; and it was agreed the firm would never be so blind to their own interest as to cherish such an idea. He had, however, schemed for years to keep himself a prominent figure before the heads of the firm. He had "toadied" to little weaknesses, and, in some few smaller and minor matters, had succeeded in placing himself in front of others who had been his seniors. It may be imagined, therefore, with what keen and bitter feelings of chagrin and disappointment he regarded the events of the previous day. To find, from the appointment which had been made, that all his plans and designs had miscarried, was a collapse to his castle-building which he little expected, and was scarcely prepared to sit down quietly under; yet how to change the apparent current of events was not so clear. In this perplexity, as a last resort, he resolved to inter-

view the members of the firm at Broadstone; and a brief note to Mr. Houghton in London, informing him of his visit to the works on a matter of importance, was the only intimation given to account for his absence from business.

"Good-morning, Arnold,—an unexpected visit. Anything wrong in London?" asked Mr. Quinion, a little nervously, readjusting his spectacles, which really needed no attention.

"No, sir; nothing," replied Arnold, who was slightly flushed, probably on account of the nature of his errand as much as the walk from the railway-station.

Taking a chair indicated to him, he at once plunged into the subject of his visit by saying, "No doubt, sir, you are surprised to see me down here, and I feel it would have been more becoming had I written first to inform you of my intention; but the circumstances of yesterday came upon all of us so sudden and unexpectedly, that it was not until late last evening I formed the decision to make this hasty and impromptu visit."

"Well, now that you have come, let me hear what it is you have to say."

"I must confess, sir," said Arnold, "that the fact of Mr. Houghton being allowed to retire is not to me so much a matter of surprise as the person who has been appointed to succeed him. If I am rightly informed, he is a man of no experience in your business, and with no record to distinguish him as one entitled to such a position. Several of us in London have been so many years in your employ, that hopes were freely entertained that, whenever the course of events should render a change necessary, an opportunity would be afforded to one of us to supply the vacancy. I, for one, cherished the hope that the experience and knowledge gained during my period of service with you might have induced you to offer me the position conferred upon Mr. Johnson."

"I am rather sorry to hear what you tell me," said Mr. Quinion; "as I may candidly inform you that the firm never had any intention of putting a member of the present staff into the position you refer to; and in asking you to regard this matter as now closed, we shall be glad if you will take any opportunity which may present itself to disabuse the minds of your colleagues, as well as that of your own, that a slight was intended to anyone by this appointment. On the other hand, it was feared that to promote any member of the London staff would probably give rise to more dissatisfaction, and create a greater amount of friction, than the installation of a perfect stranger is likely to do. It is not intended as a reflection upon anyone, but simply a matter of expediency, and which, in the interest of all concerned, we thought it wisest to adopt."

"I much regret to learn that that is your decision, sir, as I did hope it might not yet be too late to induce you to make some other arrangement."

"That is quite out of the question," replied Mr. Quinion; "and I hope you will not only give Mr. Johnson a hearty welcome, but at the same time render

him all the assistance which he will, of course, very much need."

"So far as I am concerned you may certainly reckon upon that, although I should like to have seen a different state of things prevailing."

"I regret," added Mr. Quinion, "you should have felt it needful to come down here on such an errand, as it was scarcely likely we should have taken so important a step without first giving it very careful consideration."

"I trust you will forgive me if you think I have acted indiscreetly," rejoined Arnold.

"Oh, say no more about it," was Mr. Quinion's reply. "When do you return to town?"

"By the next train, sir; at three-ten p.m."

"In that case you have no time to lose, so I will not detain you any longer. Good day."

And in less than half an hour Arnold was speeding back to London, with no very comfortable feelings. He had failed to produce the impression expected, or to change the situation of affairs; and his future course did not yet clearly shape itself to his mind.

Of course, the fact of his visit to Broadstone was known in London, but every attempt to extract from him the object of his journey failed. To all and sundry of his inquirers the uniform answer was—"Only a little private business."

## CHAPTER III.

### THE QUAY AT ANTWERP.

"Blow, wind; swell, billow; and swim bark!
The storm is up, and all is on the hazard."
*Julius Cæsar*, Act V. sc. i.

A midsummer sun was already shining upon the lazily flowing waters of the Scheldt, as the Cathedral clock rang out the hour of six; and the sweet-toned carillons, for which its tower is almost world renowned, had not yet ceased their chimes as the good ship *Kestrel*, which lay moored at the quay-side, began to sound her most unmusical whistle, preparatory to moving into midstream, outward bound for the English coast.

The quaint old market-place,—close to the river, and lying beneath the shadow of the Cathedral walls,—surrounded with lofty houses of a style peculiar

to Flemish architecture, was at this hour a scene of busy life. From early dawn the peasants and small farmers from the neighbouring villages continued to flow in, bringing such marketable commodities as were likely to find a ready sale. Butter and cheese, with pails of cream and masses of cheap vegetables, rapidly changed hands, and were carried home in baskets, or in small carts to which dogs were harnessed, and which latter seemed in no way to dislike the task they were put to, judging from the apparent cheerful and eager way in which they went at the work.

On the quay-side nearly as much life and activity prevailed as in the market-place. Porters were hurrying to and fro across the gangways; final additions were being hastily made to the cargo; the passengers were crowding in; and, as the *Kestrel's* warning bell rang, those who had come to see the last of departing friends or relatives were hurried ashore.

It is not a little peculiar that no matter what may be the hour fixed for the departure of a train or vessel, someone is sure to arrive at the last moment, when the time is up for starting; and, on the occasion we are describing, the proverbial late-comer was not wanting, in the person of a man about thirty, who just succeeded in reaching the last of the gangways, which crew and landsmen had already commenced to cast off, and made his way on board.

Freed from her moorings, with steam up, the *Kestrel* gradually proceeded into midstream, where, with tide and current in her favour, she soon began to run rapidly down the broad brown Scheldt, giving opportunity for but a passing glimpse of the magnificent lines of quays which once engrossed most of the commerce of the earth.

On leaving the city itself, the river scenery for miles is dull and uninteresting to a degree. Most of the land on either shore, lying below high-water mark, presents few features to attract the attention of the observer. Beyond an occasional house-top or a church-steeple, there is nothing to relieve the miles of flat lowlands which stretch away to the horizon line, if we except the never-ending windmills perched on the highest point of the banks to catch the breeze. When the broad lagoon-like piece of water was reached, which marks the entry to the river, and is carefully buoyed to indicate the course of vessels entering or leaving port, the welcome sound was heard of the steward's bell, announcing that breakfast was ready; and in a few minutes no one was to be seen upon deck save such of the crew as were required for the working and safety of the vessel.

A more than usual orderly company was seated at the tables, which were soon being well served for the apparently eagerly-anticipated morning meal; and whilst conversation flowed freely, there was less of that tendency to boisterous mirth which is often so marked and objectionable a feature during short sea-trips.

"A pleasant journey so far," remarked a lady to the male companion at her

side.

"Yes," was his reply; "and let us hope it will continue."

"Have you any reason to doubt it?" was the inquiry which followed.

"No; but the captain will perhaps be able to tell us presently."

At the upper end of the same table, he who had been the last to arrive on board was holding an animated conversation with a fellow-passenger on certain historical reminiscences of the city of Antwerp.

"I must confess that it is with feelings of considerable satisfaction and pride that I learned from Motley, and others, the brave stand which the doughty burghers made, three centuries ago, against the violent persecutions of the Holy Inquisition which had been set up by Charles V."

"Is it a fact that the Prince of Orange led what was, for distinction, called an insurrection?"

"Yes; and I suppose rightly so-called, since, without troubling to inquire into the mode by which its subjugation had been brought about, the Netherlands, which then included both Holland and Belgium, was under the tender rule of Philip II. of Spain."

"The husband of our own Queen Mary, was he not?"

"The same," responded the previous speaker. "And by him the government had been placed in the hands of the Duchess of Parma. The Prince, who had been sent to represent Philip, unable any longer to sustain that role, threw off his allegiance to Spain; and, with what has been described as 'the true spirit of a Christian hero,' declared for the people who had been confided to his care. It would be too long a story to recount all the events which led up to it, but it is well worth your study when you have leisure, as you will find how, by his wisdom and courage, he succeeded in obtaining for them freedom from foreign invasion, and the right of worship according to the dictates of their own conscience, without the loss of a single life."

"I say, skipper," called out a rosy-faced little man, seated close beside the two who had been thus conversing, "what sort of weather do you anticipate we shall have in crossing the German Ocean?"

"I am afraid we shall have what you will, most of you, consider a rough journey. The glass has fallen considerably within the last few hours; there is a stiffish breeze from the north, which is blowing against the tide, so that our course is not likely to be one of the smoothest."

A few exchanged ominous glances; whilst others, as soon as the meal was over, betook themselves to the cabins or bunks, and made preparations for bestowing themselves in such manner as seemed most likely to minimise the sufferings in prospect. Breakfast had not long been finished, when the bar was crossed, and the pitch and roll of the vessel began to make their influence felt.

It was high noon, and eight bells had just struck. Black clouds hid the sun from view. The wind was blowing in gusts from the north, whilst the white-crested waves were dashing and breaking over the vessel as she laboured through the trough of the billows, or mounted the crests of the foaming waves. The deck was continually being swept by the rolling seas, so that, with but few exceptions, all the passengers were closely confined below; but the exceptions seemed to be, like those stormy petrels sailors tell us are to be met with in mid-ocean, enjoying what they pleasantly described as "the fun."

The good ship was just succeeding in again making headway through the troubled waters, after clearing herself of a huge wave which had seemed as if it would engulf her, when a cry was heard from the stern of the vessel, "Man overboard!" The engines were at once stopped, the vessel's head brought round to windward, and, notwithstanding the nature of the sea prevailing, everything got ready for lowering a boat when the order should be given.

"Lower away, men!" came from the captain. And the next moment the ship's lifeboat was tossing on the crest of the waves, but pulled by strong arms, with a skilled hand at the helm. The crew, and those on deck who witnessed this scene, were full of eagerness and anxiety as to the result. It was, however, felt from the first to be an almost hopeless quest; and so in the end it proved, for after half an hour's vain search, during which time it was with difficulty the rowers kept their boat from being swamped, it was hoisted in with its living freight, and the vessel again headed for the English coast.

The intelligence of the disaster had rapidly spread through the ship, and now the question on the lips of everyone capable of attending to anything but their own condition was, "Who is it?" But this no one seemed able at present to give a reliable answer to.

After a careful inquiry had been instituted amongst the passengers, attention became concentrated upon the last arrival on board. The captain remembered to have seen him in conversation with one of the passengers during breakfast, and to have caught occasional snatches of the topics under discussion; but since then neither captain nor any of the passengers remembered to have seen him, nor could a careful examination of all on board succeed in bringing him to light. No one appeared to have noticed him on deck, and yet his absence seemed undoubtedly to point to the fact that he must be the missing man; but who he was, and whether his death was to be attributed to accident or design, none were able to say.

Later in the day an overcoat was discovered stowed away in one of the bunks, which none of the passengers could identify as belonging to them. On a careful scrutiny of the pockets, papers were found which seemed to point more definitely to the identity of the lost man. When, therefore, the *Kestrel* at length

reached her moorings in the Thames, and made her report to the proper authorities, it was taken charge of by the local police, and the matter was left with them to investigate.

## CHAPTER IV.

### RAILTON HALL.

"Time shall unfold what plaited cunning hides:
Who cover faults, at last shame them derides."
*King Lear*, Act I. sc. i.

"Come, Jennie, it's time you began to think about retiring."

"Yes, mother; in a minute," responded the young girl thus addressed.

"But do you know, child, that it is ten o'clock? an hour that is quite too late for more minutes to be allowed."

"I know, mother, but I do so want to finish what I am reading."

"You have been intent on that book for the last two hours," replied the mother,—"so intent, that you have scarcely spoken a word since you commenced; and if you sit at it much longer you will be ill to-morrow, and unable to get up when the time comes. So put it away, and go at once."

Thus fairly admonished, the girl addressed closed her book, not without evident reluctance, and prepared to obey her mother's injunction.

Mrs. Sinclair had been a widow about five years, her husband having died, after a painful and lingering illness, just as he had reached what is generally looked upon as the prime of life. Being well provided for, as soon as affairs could be settled, and her house and belongings disposed of, she left the neighbourhood in which they had for years resided,—and, with her two children, a girl and boy, now her sole charge,—to take up her abode amidst her native hills, a few miles outside the city of Aberdeen.

Her son Ralph had been given a position of some promise in the firm of H. & E. Quinion, Broadstone,—where his father had long held a high and honourable post,—with the prospect of a junior partnership in the course of a few years, in the event of all things going on satisfactorily.

Jennie, who had not yet reached her sixteenth year, was tall for her age, well proportioned, and, although not what would generally be called handsome, was an attractive girl. And the bright, clear grey eyes, beneath a more than usually

broad and expansive brow, indicated a degree of intelligence which was not slow in displaying itself.

The house in which they dwelt was one of those old-fashioned ones so often to be met with outside our large towns and cities, possessing no apparent design in its construction, through the numerous additions and alterations from time to time made, to suit the convenience or taste of successive tenants, without any regard for harmony or unity.

Spacious and convenient, it was also rambling and not handsome. Surrounded by extensive grounds, and well wooded, it was hidden from view of the ordinary traveller, but well known to the residents around,—who were frequent visitors at Railton Hall,—as well as to cottars and villagers, with whom Mrs. Sinclair kept up a close acquaintance.

"What time do you expect Ralph in the morning, mother?" asked Jennie, as she prepared to retire for the night.

"The train is due at Aberdeen at nine-forty-five, and if it keeps time we may expect him here about ten-fifteen," said her mother. "I have ordered Donald to have the trap ready to drive me to the station to meet him at that hour; so we breakfast at eight-thirty."

"Very well, mother; then I will tell Alice to call me at eight"; and with a good-night kiss the young girl left the room.

Before following her daughter's example, Mrs. Sinclair drew a letter from her pocket bearing a foreign postmark, to read—not for the first time—the intelligence which was already well impressed upon her memory—

"DEAR MOTHER,—I leave Antwerp to-morrow morning at six o'clock, and hope to return by the night mail, due in Aberdeen at nine-forty-five the next morning. Your loving son, RALPH."

With fond anticipations of the morning, the anxious mother retired to rest.

* * * * *

The morning broke in the midst of a proverbial Scotch mist, and everything presented a damp and uncanny appearance, calculated to produce a depressing influence upon minds expectant and anxious.

Mrs. Sinclair had spent a restless and uneasy night, thinking of him she hoped so soon to clasp in a motherly embrace. Her son had been absent now some months, travelling on the Continent, on business for the firm by whom he was employed, and the nearer the time of his return, the greater was the mother's agitation and anxiety; so that it was only by a supreme effort she was enabled to control her feelings and maintain an outwardly calm appearance. Breakfast was all too rapidly despatched for full justice to have been done to it, and mother and

daughter mounted the trap, which Donald drove with all needful speed to the station, where they found they had still some time to wait.

The train was late in arriving, but when it drew up at the platform eager and anxious glances were directed on each passenger as he alighted. They failed, however, to discover the one they were in search of; and when at length the platform was deserted, they had reluctantly to admit that Ralph had not travelled by that train, but what could have prevented his doing so they were utterly at a loss to conjecture.

## CHAPTER V.

### VISIONS OF THE KLONDYKE.

"Much have I travelled in the realms of gold."—KEATS.

When Arnold reached home in the evening, from Broadstone, he felt anything but pleased on learning that visitors had arrived and were awaiting his return. Tired and disappointed, he would have preferred being left to his own thoughts; but this was a privilege which for the present, at least, he found he had to forego. The first greetings over, his little wife informed him that his cousins from Jersey had arrived about an hour before him.

"They are on their way to Liverpool, bound for the Klondyke," she added.

"Where are they staying?" asked Arnold.

"I have not asked them that," she replied, "as I wanted to hear what you thought about our trying to accommodate them here for three nights, so as to save them the expense of going to an hotel."

"But you know how very limited is the space at our disposal, my dear!"

"True," said Mrs. Arnold; "but it is not for long, and no doubt they will be much better pleased."

"Well, if you feel that you can manage it, and they are willing to accept what accommodation we have to offer, I shall be quite prepared to fall in with whatever arrangement you like to make."

"Very well; then I have no doubt we shall be able to settle matters to their satisfaction. And now, dear, you had better go and change your things, and make yourself look spruce, and then join us in the drawing-room, which will leave me at liberty to see to the supper."

Later in the evening, when the proposals of Mrs. Arnold for the disposal

and accommodation of the cousins were laid before them, they were only too pleased to avail themselves of the offered hospitality.

John and Charles Barton, whose ages were respectively twenty-three and twenty-seven years, had worked on a small farm which their father rented until the old man died, which event happened three or four years prior to the present period. For the past three years they had continued it on their own account, but, failing to make it pay, they had sold everything off and resolved to emigrate. It was just about this time that the Klondyke successes began to be all the talk, and so taken were they with the marvellous stories related of that region that they determined to try their fortune on its inhospitable shores. Their purses were not too well lined, nor their prospects sufficiently promising, to render them independent of any little help or assistance they might meet with from friends on their way.

"What port are you bound for, Jack?" inquired Arnold.

"We go to Montreal, and thence by Canadian and Pacific line across the American Continent to San Francisco."

"Isn't that the longest way there?" asked Arnold.

"That is so; but then it is by far the easier. All accounts are pretty unanimous in depicting not only the danger but the difficulties of the so-called Chilcoot Pass."

"But what about the White Pass?"

"That appears to be the worst of the three, since it leads through a very rough country, over steep hills, through swift streams, and over a pass which, although said to be one thousand feet lower than the Chilcoot, is declared by surveyors to be two hundred feet higher. And as it is longer and more difficult we have thought it best to take the river route."

"What is the difference in the matter of time over—say the Chilcoot route?"

"The time of starting may be somewhat later, as we shall have to wait until it is known that the navigation of the Yukon River is opened."

"What distance have you to travel on the Yukon?"

"To Dawson City is one thousand seven hundred and fifty miles; and from San Francisco to Dawson City, which is altogether about four thousand five hundred and nine miles, the Steamship Companies estimate the time needed for this journey at thirty days, whilst through or over the passes it varies from fifty to seventy days."

"Probably more often seventy than fifty days?"

"No doubt of it."

"And I suppose the river route has other advantages besides?"

"Oh, decidedly! Our luggage, for example, has not to be carried, or packed, as it would have to be if we went to Skagway, Dyea, or some one of the ports

leading to the passes."

"That, of course, is a consideration, as well as a great saving in comfort and convenience."

"Exactly; for you must remember that with several hundred pounds weight of goods on the beach, it would be no very easy matter arranging and carrying out all the details necessary for transferring them over the mountains to the headwaters of the Yukon."

"No; I daresay you are right," added Arnold.

"Well, we have studied the matter, and, after careful thought, have no doubt whatever that although it may mean some delay at San Francisco or St. Michael's, waiting for the opening of navigation, and the possibility of arriving a little later at the 'diggings,' we shall not be worn out and fagged as we should be if we risked our goods and lives over the Chilcoot Pass."

"And you think you can stand the climate?" asked Arnold.

"We intend to try," was Jack's response. "Mr. Ogilvie, who was commissioned by the Canadian Government to make certain explorations on their behalf in that region, and who spent some eleven years off and on there, says, 'I know many Englishmen from all parts of England who have been in it, five, six, and even twelve years, without being injured by the cold. No one that I know of, taking proper care of himself, has ever been hurt by the rigour of the climate.'"

"All I can say is," wound up Arnold, "that I sincerely hope you may find it to be the El Dorado you are anticipating, and return home millionaires."

Three days later the cousins took their departure for Liverpool, and in due course embarked on board the outward-bound steamer for Montreal, full of hopeful anticipations of that future in a new land which imagination seldom fails to surround with a halo of romance.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS.

"Things outward
Do draw the inward quality after them,
To suffer all alike."
*Antony and Cleopatra*, Act III. sc. xi.

To the outward observer the London business of H. & E. Quinion was unchanged.

The carriages of its wealthy patrons stood outside, as for years had been the custom, whilst their titled occupants paraded round the palatial show-rooms, frequently with a desire to gratify the eye by a sight of the many objects of artistic beauty to be seen, rather than for the purpose of purchasing the wares exhibited. City men called on their way to business, gave their orders, and, without unnecessary delay, departed. Ladies entered later in the day, with little to do and plenty of time at their disposal, taking up the time of the patient salesmen, wearying them with needless questions, and compelling them to pander to their little whims and fads. But the undercurrent of dissatisfaction and annoyance which prevailed, together with the feeling of uncertainty and unrest which had been created, were not matters of concern for the general public, and therefore remained

"Unrevealed to mortal sense."

Yet they were influences which were working, and working prejudicially, for all concerned.

Scarcely a month had elapsed since the announcement of Mr. Houghton's retirement, when Roberts was called into the manager's office, and informed that the firm had resolved to dispense with his services, and that the notice was to take effect in a month from that day. It was not without much hesitancy, and a display of no little emotion, that the venerable manager communicated this very unwelcome piece of intelligence. Its effect on Roberts may be better imagined than described. It was a crisis which he had never for one moment anticipated; and it filled him with astonishment and dismay. As soon as he had somewhat recovered from the shock which it naturally gave him, his first inquiry was for the reason of this; when he was informed that the firm desired to make certain changes, in order to reduce the expenses of the London establishment, and that Gregory had also received a similar notice.

"But, sir," said Roberts, "what does the firm expect I am going to do?"

"They don't say," was the reply of Mr. Houghton, in a tone of helplessness.

"Well," added Roberts, "I should never have expected such treatment from a firm standing so high as this does in the opinion of all who have any knowledge of it."

"And a few months ago I should have expressed a similar opinion," said the manager; "but circumstances have changed."

"Changed! I should think they have!" exclaimed Roberts. "When a wealthy firm such as this is can say to a man who has been in their employ upwards of a quarter of a century—with whom they find no fault, but simply to enable them to reduce expenses—you are to leave us in a month! it is anything but a fair or

honourable way of treating a man at my time of life."

"I deeply regret to be the bearer of such a message to you," said Mr. Houghton, "and can only advise you to write the firm, and fully express your views and feelings on the subject."

Acting upon this advice, Roberts at once wrote a long but respectful letter to the firm at Broadstone, setting forth the hardship of the position in which he was thus suddenly placed; the difficulty which a man of his years would experience in obtaining another situation; and suggesting that he be allowed an interview with the firm at Broadstone before such a drastic measure was put into force.

In course of post a reply was received declining the suggested interview, on the ground that it would be useless, since before arriving at their decision to act as they had done every circumstance had been fully considered; and whilst they recognised the value of the services which had been rendered, and had no fault to find with him, they must decline to reconsider an act the consequences of which had been well thought over before being made known.

This was cold comfort for a man in Roberts' position.

The day his notice expired a cheque arrived, which the manager handed him, with expressions of regret that such a course had been found necessary. The cheque was equivalent to two months' salary.

Thus at the age of fifty, after spending the best years of his life in the service of the firm, Roberts found himself thrown upon the world, with no stain upon his reputation, compelled to commence again the battle of life, and to join the ranks of the large army of the unemployed.

Such treatment is an evil of long standing, and is a tyranny which the poor and defenceless have to suffer from the wealthy.

"In the interest of the firm" was the only plea which could be urged for the course pursued. But the happiness, the future, the health, nay the very life, of the man concerned, were all nothing, and might well be sacrificed to the grasping capitalist "*in the interest of the firm*."

## CHAPTER VII.

### FAR WEST.

"To the West, to the West, to the land of the free."—HENRY RUSSELL.

Some thirty miles or more from the banks of the Qu'Appelle River, the scenery

is wild and romantic. Winding creeks abound, into which are projected rocky promontories; deep ravines, formed by enormous boulders of red and grey granite, the beds bestrewn with the bones and relics of the former inhabitants of this vast country; stunted poplars, or weedy willows, with a varied undergrowth of wild fruit-bushes, contribute to form an impenetrable undergrowth and an almost pathless bush.

Still farther inland, the "rolling prairie" meets the traveller's view—a waving grassy expanse, which, when set in motion by the wind, is like nothing so much as the boundless ocean, of which nearly all writers agree it most vividly reminds them.

Towards the close of a Canadian summer's day, a solitary horseman might have been seen pursuing his weary way along the banks of a winding creek some few miles from the Qu'Appelle. An Englishman, not more than thirty years of age, well mounted; his cord breeches and hunting-boots, and a rifle slung across the shoulder, gave him an appearance of having some acquaintance with a settler's wild life.

Human habitations were only to be met with at long intervals, when occasionally a hunter's shanty made itself visible amongst the trees. Out on the prairie were to be seen log-houses and shanties here and there; and some twenty or thirty miles distant, eastward, the indications of a little town, only just faintly visible on the far horizon.

The jaded condition of both man and steed were unmistakable signs of the many weary miles which had been passed in the saddle, and it was with a feeling of relief that he espied a substantial-looking range of log buildings, marking out their owner as a man of some means, who must have made his way, and succeeded in overcoming the initial difficulties of a settler's life.

The deserted look of the place was not, at first sight, encouraging. As, however, he drew in rein at the door of the house, its owner—a man apparently in the prime of life—advanced to meet him. Dressed in a suit of homespun garments, remarkable for their ease and convenience rather than their elegance, his good-humoured and good-tempered looking face gave every indication of a hearty welcome awaiting those who happened to be in need of it.

"Good evening, friend," said the settler, as the rider jumped from his horse, retaining hold of the reins with a loose hand. "Here, Tom," he added, calling to a stalwart-looking youth who had made his appearance from a row of wooden shanties which formed the stabling of the settlement, "take and put up this gentleman's horse. See that he has a good rub down before feeding, for he looks pretty well done up."

"And so I should think he was," said his owner, "since it is about seven hours since our last halt for rest or refreshment of any kind."

"Come in, come in, my friend; and we will soon see what the larder has to put before you."

"Well, if I may so far trespass upon Canadian hospitality, I shall only be too glad to accept anything you may be able to offer me."

"Rely upon it that Canadian hospitality will never be backward in giving a right good hearty welcome to travellers from the Old Country, whom fortune or misfortune may bring to our shores."

"Your words," said the tired horseman, as he followed his guide into the house, "have a true British ring in them, which makes one feel at home at once."

"Well, I don't want it ever to be said that James Ranger was the man to turn away the stranger needing help from his door."

Rough and unfinished in appearance as most of the appointments about the place seemed, there was yet that air of comfort and cleanliness which is the marked characteristic of nearly all Canadian houses. A living-room with a kitchen attached—the walls of which had been rendered smooth with endless coats of whitewash—formed the downstairs apartments. In the centre of the room was a rough deal table, on which a tidy white cloth was being spread by a comely-looking, matronly woman well past forty. A couple of cushioned rocking-chairs stood one on each side of a capacious fireplace, and two or three ordinary chairs, neatly cushioned, against the wall. In one corner was a serviceable chest of drawers, with a few books on the top; whilst in front of the window was a small but substantial-looking table, having all the appearance of being home-made, on which a pot with a flower in it was standing. The floor was painted yellow, and partly covered with rag carpets and rugs.

Seating himself, without waiting for any further invitation, our traveller at once proceeded to divest himself of his boots, preliminary to that rest and ease so necessary after a hard day's ride.

Full justice having been done to the ample provisions spread out before her tired guest, the two men lighted their pipes, and, seating themselves in the rear of the house, on a wooden bench running along the full length of the wall, and commanding an extensive view of the magnificent open country beyond, after a few general observations, the old settler, whose curiosity had been aroused by a few casual remarks which had fallen from his guest, inquired—

"Well, my friend, I do not want to pry into your secrets, but may I ask where you are bound for, and what are your intentions in wandering so far away out of the beaten track of ordinary civilised life?"

"Well, the fact is, I am a wanderer, with little more to call my own than Jacob had when, with a stone for his pillow, he slept peacefully in the open, dreaming of the future and a land beyond. Who I am is of little consequence, since I have disgraced my lineage, sullied a good name, and am now seeking to hide my head

somewhere—anywhere—so that I may escape recognition, and if possible live out a life which, opening with promise, is destined to close, as that of all wastrels do, in sorrow and disgust!"

"Come, come, young man,—for you are yet young,—it is neither good nor right that you should talk in such a hopeless or despairing tone; whatever may have been your past—and I do not seek to know it beyond what you may be disposed willingly to reveal—there is time yet before you in which wrong-doing may perhaps be atoned for, and some effort made to redeem the past."

"Ah, if you knew all, I am afraid you would be less disposed to say so."

"Well, let's see now," said Ranger. "What are your plans?—if you have formed any."

"Plans I can scarcely be said to have made, unless to wander aimlessly on until chance puts me on the track of doing something for somebody, which will bring me bread-and-cheese, can be called such. Since landing at Montreal, where I bought my horse and the few things you see I possess, and started off into the interior, I have subsisted occasionally by a few purchases, but mainly on the hospitality which has been freely dispensed at the various farmhouses or settlements I have passed through. I shall continue to pursue this course until chance throws me into the way of some employment which I shall be able to enter into."

"Not a very startling or encouraging prospect," was Ranger's comment; "but since time is not an important object with you under such circumstances, you may as well make a short stay here and have a look round."

"With all my heart," replied the traveller, "if you do not think I shall be in the way."

"No fear of that. There is plenty of room out here. We are not overburdened with inhabitants, and can very well spare the trifle you will cost for living; so we will consider that point settled, and we can return to the subject after you have had a good night's rest."

As the evening closed in, the weary traveller was glad to be shown to a comfortable bed, which the kind-hearted hostess had been busily preparing for him, and in less than ten minutes the sounds which issued from his sleeping apartment proclaimed most unmistakably that he was soundly sleeping.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### MONTREAL.

"I hold the world but as the world...;

A stage, where every man must play a part."
*Merchant of Venice*, Act I. sc. i.

The Bartons in due course reached Montreal. The passage across was uneventful, and has been so often described that it needs no record here. On landing, they proceeded at once to the ship's agent to whom they had been recommended, and sought from him instructions and information as to their future course. This was readily given. And as they felt they could spare two or three days to gaze upon the sights of this wonderful city, after securing a lodging they took advantage of the opportunity for doing so.

A traveller who visited the city fifty years ago described it as being "one of the oldest settlements on the North American Continent." It stands upon the site of an ancient Indian settlement, all traces of which were soon obliterated by the progressive action of the pale-faces. At first named Mount Royal, in honour of the King of France, after sixty or seventy years' usage it appears to have been corrupted, or changed, to Montreal, but by whom and under what circumstances is not apparent. The town extends along the border of the St. Lawrence for some miles, nearly midway between Quebec and Ottawa, and the principal streets run almost parallel with the river. The older parts of the town forcibly remind one of some of the oldest cities in France, and are as ill-conceived and badly arranged as many of the worst streets of old London. The more modern parts are designed and built in the best of style, justifying its being described as "a noble city of stone edifices, rising from a crowded harbour to its mountain park." This mountain park is an adjunct such as no other city on the Continent can boast of, "whilst its shipping and business quarters give evidence of wealth and commercial activity, which invest it with more than a passing interest."

The two Bartons spent a good deal of time inspecting the chief attractions of the city, until, tired with their wanderings, as they passed through Notre Dame Street they came to a narrow turning, down which they were induced to venture on seeing a small crowd about the centre. On making their way through, they found it to be one of those brawls common enough in their own land, and which they soon learned was not regarded as a strange thing in these parts. It was a fight between two men, with an excited crowd of partisans egging them on. Presently the police arrived on the scene, when an end was quickly put to the combative feelings of the crowd, which was dispersed in very much the fashion that similar crowds are dispersed in the Old Country.

Retracing their steps, their attention was arrested by an ordinary but respectable-looking refreshment bar, which they entered.

A seafaring man was seated at one of the tables, drinking whisky, and

loudly declaiming against some injustice—real or imaginary—he wanted his hearers to believe he had suffered at the hands of the Customs' authorities. A group of interested listeners was gathered about him, which our friends joined; but after a while, not feeling interested in the subject he was dilating upon, they separated themselves from the group, and, selecting a table which was unoccupied, ordered a modest meal, such as they believed their means would admit of.

When the time to settle up arrived, what was their dismay and horror to find that their pockets had been emptied of all the money they possessed.

Calling the proprietor, they made known to him their dilemma; but he refused to admit that they had been robbed in his house, and as they could not declare with any certainty that this was the case, they were required to pay; but how to do this was not so easy to determine.

A grinning crowd soon surrounded them, expressing considerable doubts about the *bonâ fides* of their representations. They, however, succeeded in convincing the landlord that they were what they represented themselves to be by producing the railway tickets, which they had fortunately taken for their forward journey; and he, relying upon their promise to forward the sum due out of the first money they made, allowed them to depart after some little haggling.

Their difficulties, however, were not yet over. It had been their intention to stay a few days longer in Montreal, and they had accordingly engaged their lodgings with that object in view. This was now rendered impossible. They had left a deposit with the lodging-house keeper, so that the only plan they could think of was to interview her, make a clean breast of their position, and, in the event of finding her incredulous, forfeit the money in hand and start at once to the West.

The day being well advanced, they returned to the lodging-house where they had intended staying, which was situate in one of the streets contiguous to the harbour.

The landlady, a sharp-looking little woman, incredulous at first as to the truth of their story, explained that she had so frequently been done by similar representations that they must not feel surprised at her hesitating to accept their statement as true. Convinced at length, she agreed to allow them to remain the night in return for the deposit, so that they might be able to depart by the morning train, outward bound at nine-five a.m. This difficulty overcome, it was not so clear to our two friends how they were to subsist during the long journey which lay before them.

From the police they obtained very little that could be considered satisfactory. The street they described had an indifferent reputation, and the restaurant at which they had stopped was frequently being brought under their notice. But the fact of their having mingled in the row in the street rendered it so extremely

probable that the robbery took place there, that they held out no hopes of their loss being recovered. Acting upon police advice, they resolved to call upon the British Consul and acquaint him with the destitute position in which this event had placed them, in the hope that he might be willing to render them a little assistance.

They had not far to go to reach that useful official, into whose presence they were readily admitted.

He was a tall, handsome-looking man, with a fine military bearing, who had well passed the meridian of life. His face was a study which Lavater would have revelled over; it had all the expression of good-humour and a kindly disposition, so delightful to meet with, yet accompanied with a pair of expressive blue eyes which seemed to pierce the person they were looking at. He was certainly not the man to be imposed upon, yet he was quite prepared to listen and weigh a fairly good tale of trouble.

The story of the Bartons was very simple. After taking their tickets at Liverpool, they had the balance out of one hundred pounds left. They had not spent much since reaching Montreal beyond the price of their railway tickets, which had been taken to San Francisco. They had therefore more than half the money they had begun with intact, when so unfortunately deprived of the balance.

Their papers and railway tickets tended to confirm these statements, whilst their manners and appearance were sufficient to convince His Majesty's representative their story was a true one.

"I believe all you tell me," said his Excellency, "and am afraid the treatment you have received from our countrymen will not lead you to form a too favourable impression of them."

"On the contrary," spoke up the elder of the two men, "we feel that there was a great want of thought on our part in the matter, and the kindness we have already met with convinces us that in this country, as in England, the bad are always to be found mixed up with the good."

"I am glad you take that sensible view of the affair; and at the same time, whilst regretting that I cannot make up your loss, which it would perhaps not be wise for me to do, yet to convince you that, as a people, we are not indisposed to extend a helping hand to those who stand in need of it, I shall be quite willing to make you a present of ten pounds, trusting you will guard it with more care than that which has gone."

"Your Excellency's offer is far more than we had any right to anticipate, and overwhelms us with gratitude. It is a noble and generous act, for which we cannot find words adequately to express our feelings."

"Good day," added the Consul, as they were leaving; "in the land you are going to I hope you will find what you are in search of."

"And be assured, sir, you will have no reason to regret your confidence in us, for the very first moneys we succeed in making will be devoted to the return of what we prefer to regard as a loan."

And it was with a feeling of proud satisfaction that, in less than six months, the elder Barton found himself in a position to remit the amount to his Excellency, in a letter which expressed the gratitude felt for the timely help so kindly and generously afforded.

## CHAPTER IX

### RANGER'S RANCH.

"Thou, like a kind fellow, gave thyself away; and I thank thee."
*Henry IV.*, Part II. Act IV. sc. iii.

Guide-books tell us that "the Dominion of Canada is the largest of the British possessions," and it is difficult to form a true conception of the vast area comprised within the limits of our North American Provinces.

No country has such grand possibilities before it, and its progress of recent years has been remarkable. All Canadians are proud of their country, and believe in it.

But we are not at present concerned so much about Canada in general, or as a whole, as we are with that section which lies some few hundred miles west of Winnipeg, in the district of Assiniboia.

It was here, in the lovely valley of the Qu'Appelle River, that we left our weary traveller at Ranger's Ranch, with a prospect of provisional entertainment, until something suitable could be decided upon for his future.

Having, as he explained, no definite plan of action before him, he very readily fell in with a proposal Ranger made, in the course of a few days, to stay and assist on the farm, so as to ascertain to what extent he was adapted for agricultural pursuits, and whether it was a life he would be willing to settle down to.

"What sort of climate have you here?" was one of the earliest questions asked by Fellows, the name he had expressed a wish to be known by.

"Much the same as prevails in the neighbouring province of Manitoba," was Ranger's reply. "The summer months usually bright, clear, and very warm, but nights cool."

"How is it later on?"

"The autumn months are the finest of the year."

"No rain?"

"Frequently the atmosphere is dry and free from moisture for several weeks."

"Is your winter exceptionally hard?"

"For the matter of that," replied Ranger, "much depends upon constitution. Without doubt it is cold, but there is usually very little wind, and almost constant sunshine; there is no snowfall to any great depth, and traffic is but slightly impeded. In fact, the general dryness of the air causes it to be exceedingly bracing and healthy."

"I suppose you consider it superior to that of the Old Country?"

"Decidedly I do! Experience would tell me that, but the testimony of our Officer of Health goes to confirm it. Listen to what he says," added Ranger, as he took down a little book from the slender stock on the shelf by his side: "'We are absolutely protected by our climatic conditions from several of the most dangerous and fatal diseases, whilst others, which are common to all peoples on the face of the earth, are comparatively rare.'"

"Your favourable description, added to my own brief experience, so charms me, that I feel very much like staying where I am," said Fellows.

"Well, friend, if you are really so minded I daresay we can manage to fix you," was Ranger's rejoinder.

"I am extremely grateful for your kind reception, and courteous treatment, of a perfect stranger, as well as for your further promise and all that it implies; but unless I can be made of some use by you I shall certainly object to becoming a burden here."

"We shall not let you be that," said Ranger. "To-morrow morning I am going to drive into the railway station, which is some fifteen miles out, on the branch line of the C.P.R. running through the valley. You can go with me, as it will give you a good opportunity of seeing a little more of the surroundings, and perhaps enable you to judge of what there is to be done."

Left to himself, with the afternoon before him, Fellows strolled away to the top of a hill which commanded an extensive view over the prairie-land surrounding him on all sides, and there, seating himself beneath a sheltering tree, his thoughts wandered away to a distant home, where in imagination he saw the features of those he loved, and who were seldom absent from his mind. A stranger might not have been able to tell the current of thought engaging his attention, but it would have been apparent to the most casual observer, by the contracted brow and the gloom on his countenance, that his reflections were none of the pleasantest.

After a considerable lapse of time, his attention was diverted by hearing distant sounds of voices borne upon the still air, apparently proceeding from a rough-looking timber construction, the abode of some one of the many farm-hands engaged upon the Ranch.

Built upon a spur of the hill, in a somewhat deep indentation, it was a little distant from where he was seated, but he soon became an attentive observer of all that was passing.

A labouring-looking man came from the house with a pail, and ran with all haste to a pond at a short distance and commenced filling it, but before he could return loud screams proceeded from the interior, which caused Fellows to hasten down the hill in order to ascertain the cause of the commotion.

Reaching the dwelling at the same time as did the other with his pail of water, he found the living-room in a blaze of fire, whilst screams were proceeding from a room beyond, all communication with which appeared to be cut off by the trend of the flames. Taking a handkerchief from his pocket, he hastily dipped it in the pail the man was carrying, wrung it out, tied it round his mouth, and then rushed swiftly through the flames into the room where the sounds of distress were to be heard.

On reaching the room, a task which was only successfully accomplished with much difficulty, and considerable painful cost, he beheld a female form sink fainting to the ground, overcome, apparently, by the heat and smoke, of which latter the apartment was full.

To raise her from the floor was the work of an instant; his next proceeding was to place her upon a bed in the room, roll a blanket round her, and rush through the smoke and flame to the outer room with as much speed as the weight of the burden he bore would permit.

The fiery marks on face and hands, which were subsequently to be seen, bore eloquent testimony to the severity of the ordeal he had passed through in accomplishing the dangerous and difficult task so bravely and fearlessly undertaken.

When the outbreak was observed from the other stations on the Ranch, a number of willing hands began to congregate with all haste, and with the assistance of such appliances as were most readily available a united effort was made to stem the progress of the flames. These, however, had by this time obtained so firm a hold, that it was evident the building, with its contents, was doomed. In a short while nothing remained of the humble dwelling but a blackened and smouldering ruin.

The inanimate form of his daughter occupied all the attention of Russell, the late occupier of the hut, who, as soon as she could be restored to consciousness, was found not to have suffered much harm, thanks to the brave and timely efforts

of Fellows on her behalf.

He, however, had not escaped so freely, having suffered considerably about the hands and face, which had been exposed to the full force of the flames as he twice made his way through them.

A cart was procured, in which he was at once placed and driven back to Ranger's dwelling, to be doctored with such native measures as Mrs. Ranger was able hastily to command.

The cause of the fire, as the girl explained when she was sufficiently recovered to do so, was one of common occurrence. Some light articles of clothing had been hung in front of the fire to air, and whilst Russell sat enjoying his after-dinner nap, she had gone into the other room to attend to certain domestic duties, and during this temporary absence a spark must have set the things on fire, which was only discovered when the outer room was in a blaze.

As the few things which Russell possessed were all destroyed, arrangements had to be temporarily made for the accommodation of himself and his daughter in two of the other huts on the Ranch, until his own could again be rebuilt.

Leaving instructions for all hands to turn to in the morning, and help put up another dwelling for the two who had been thus suddenly left houseless, Ranger, who, as soon as informed of what was happening, had lost no time in proceeding to the scene of the fire, returned home to see how it fared with Fellows, and to make preparations for his journey in the morning, which would now have to be undertaken without his companionship.

Fellows was in a high state of fever; whilst many of the burns he had sustained were seen to be of such a serious character that it was felt more skilled assistance would have to be procured. A messenger was at once despatched into the town—distant some fifteen miles—for the only medical man in the neighbourhood.

It was shortly after four o'clock in the afternoon, that, mounted on a good horse, the messenger set out for M'Lean Station, in hopes of finding the doctor and returning with him. His way for the most part was over rolling prairie, relieved by clumps of trees, which are to be found on the borders of such lakes and streams as are constantly to be met with; or down amid the hollows, where grow the heavy luxuriant grasses from which the farmer obtains his supply of winter hay.

As the slanting rays of the westering sun were sending up their brilliant points into the clear blue vault above, Ranger's messenger drew rein before the door of the doctor's dwelling, a very unpretentious, one-storeyed detached villa—one of some half-dozen—standing upon a hillside leading up to the station.

Dr. Fisherton was not at home; he had left in the early morning for the

Pleasant Hills, in response to an imperative request from a Nat Langham, who kept a store, and farmed a small holding at the foot of the hills, and was not expected back till late. There was no help for it but to wait. So, stabling his horse, he accompanied his negro attendant into the servants' quarters, determined to make himself as comfortable as possible for the time being.

After doing full justice to the meal which was presently spread out before him, and which his long ride had well prepared him for, he lighted his pipe and seated himself at the window to wait for the doctor's return.

Slowly the hours seemed to pass, until eleven o'clock struck, without any signs of the doctor's appearance. At length the sound of a horse's feet were heard approaching, and soon all doubt was put at rest with the entry of the man so long expected.

The appearance of the doctor was that of a man in the prime of life; tall, and with a good physique, and a countenance calculated to impart confidence almost at a glance.

On learning that a messenger was in waiting for him, he, without standing on ceremony, immediately made his way to where he was sitting and inquired the nature of his business.

"There's been a fire, sir, this afternoon, at Farmer Ranger's, and one of his men is very seriously injured; in fact, when I left home he was in a high state of fever, so that it was thought advisable to send me, in order, if possible, to take you back at once to him."

"Well, you see I was out and in the saddle early this morning, and have only just returned after a hard day's work. What do you say to staying the night, so that we may start together soon after daylight in the morning?"

"It may sound a little inconsiderate, sir," responded the man, "but if you could manage to come now, we shall be able to reach the Ranch about two o'clock; and my own opinion is, that it is a case where every hour may be a matter of importance."

After reflecting for a few moments, during which time he seemed to be turning the matter well over in his mind, he announced his decision in a manner which admitted of no appeal.

"I think it would be very unwise to start at such an hour. It is late; there is no moon; the track is very uneven; and in the darkness it would not be difficult to miss one's way. Besides, the ground is not free from loafers and tramps—to give them no more desperate title—whom it would be dangerous to meet at such a time. We will bed you up for the night, and start in the morning soon after the dawn; and instead of reaching the farm at the unearthly hour of two, get there between six and seven, a delay of four or five hours, which, on the whole, I think will be a far preferable arrangement."

The wisdom of the course recommended was too evident to admit of dispute; therefore, after giving orders for the morning, the doctor retired, and the man was shown at once to his sleeping apartment, and for a few brief hours sought a welcome rest.

The grey light of dawn was stealing rapidly up from the east when the messenger, Burt, was awakened by the negro attendant and told that it was time to be up. To arise and dress, for a man of his habits, was not a work occupying much time; in less than ten minutes he was seated in the kitchen, doing ample justice to the well-spread table before him. And by the time the doctor was ready to depart, Burt was in the saddle by his side, and together they started on their ride to the Ranch.

The atmosphere being clear, the view up the valley along which they journeyed was uninterrupted. Where the river ran there was a thick and tangled line of vegetation, but the absence of rain had reduced it to the proportions of a very modest stream, flowing sluggishly within narrow limits. As they reached higher ground they found it everywhere thickly covered with the short crisp variety of grass known as "buffalo grass," forming excellent pasture both in winter and summer.

Familiarity may not always breed contempt, because of the beauty of things with which long association has rendered one familiar, nevertheless it induces indifference. And in the case of our two friends—Fisherton and Burt—the scenes through which they were passing had been so frequently viewed by them, that it was with a species of indifference they rapidly pushed on, intent upon accomplishing their journey with as little delay as possible.

Reaching the farm just as Ranger and his household were about to sit down to breakfast, they were fully prepared, after rising so early and their long and rather exhausting ride, to join him at the morning meal.

When seated at the breakfast-table, the doctor inquired about the patient he had come to see, and was informed that he had passed a very restless night, with fitful intervals of sleep, and seemed to be in great pain.

"When your messenger arrived, it happened, unfortunately," said Dr. Fisherton, "that I was out. A mounted messenger from the Pleasant Hills had that morning arrived to say I was wanted at Nat Langham's Store, where a free fight had resulted in one man being shot dead and two others severely wounded, and I was unable to get back until eleven at night, when I found him waiting to bring me here."

"Ah, I see!" added Ranger; "and of course you naturally felt it was too late to start out then to come here."

"That is just it, my friend. Your man wanted me to do so; but I decided that, rather than arrive here in the middle of the night, it would be better to take

a few hours' rest, start with the dawn, and get here, as we have done, in broad daylight."

"Quite right, doctor; and when you have finished breakfast, I will take you to the patient, and let you see for yourself if you think the delay has done him any harm."

"I trust not," was the doctor's only comment.

Breakfast over, the "gudewife" conducted the doctor to the bedroom of the invalid, whilst Ranger set about preparing for his journey into town.

After a careful examination of the injuries he had received, the doctor pronounced them to be in no sense dangerous, although serious. The measures which had been adopted to allay irritation and heal the burns were highly approved; and, having dressed the wounded parts and administered a cooling draught, he took his departure, giving strict instructions as to the course to be followed, with a view to reduce the fever, and promising to return in three days unless previously sent for, which he did not apprehend would be necessary.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE MISSING LINK.

"'There is no God,' the foolish saith,—
But none, 'There is no sorrow.'"—E. B. BROWNING.

On returning to the Hall, after her purposeless journey to the railway-station to meet her son Ralph, Mrs. Sinclair waited the whole of that day, anxiously hoping that some intelligence would be received to account for his non-arrival, but neither letter nor message of any kind arrived.

After spending a restless night, and the morning post bringing nothing to relieve the oppression which was weighing upon her mind, she told her daughter of her intention to drive into town and make inquiry at the offices of the agents, to see if anything could be learned about the passengers by the *Kestrel*.

There she was informed of the vessel's safe arrival; but that during the voyage, a passenger—supposed to be Ralph Sinclair, from papers discovered in the pocket of a coat believed to be his, as no one could be found to claim it—had been lost in mid-ocean, and that, although every effort was made at the time, they had been unsuccessful in recovering the body.

The grief of both mother and daughter at this intelligence was heartrending

to witness, and may be better imagined than described.

They returned home in a state well-nigh bordering upon distraction, and for some hours were hopelessly helpless with grief. The news, brief though it was, seemed too circumstantial to be doubted.

Later in the day, when slightly recovered from the shock which the first intelligence of her loss had caused, she resolved to write to the firm in whose employ he was engaged, in the all but vain hope they might know something with regard to his movements which would throw doubt upon the report to hand. Having done this, it remained only to wait two weary days before a reply could be received.

Ralph had for some years been in the service of H. & E. Quinion, at Broadstone, and held a responsible position, which took him frequently to the Continent and other parts in executing the orders of the firm.

Early the next morning a telegram came to hand, sent by the firm in question, saying, "Nothing known of R. S. beyond what the papers say to-day. Letter follows." The letter, which was received the next morning, added little to what was already known, and only contained the firm's expression of regret if the news should turn out to be true.

Acting under advice, Mrs. Sinclair wrote the owners of the *Kestrel*, asking them to forward her such effects as were found upon their vessel which were believed to belong to her son; and in the course of a few days she received a parcel containing an overcoat, with his pocket-book,—sad memorials of one fondly loved but now lost for ever.

Some months later, she was rather astonished to receive a visit from one of the members of the firm who happened to be away up North on a holiday tour; and to learn from him that it had been discovered that the financial relations of her son with them were anything but what they should be. That, from inquiries they had felt it necessary to make, he had not only been mixed up with a very questionable class of companions, but had made free use of the moneys of the firm which had passed through his hands. At cards, it would seem, he had lost heavily, and had paid his debts with gold that was not his own.

[image]

*AT CARDS HE HAD LOST HEAVILY.*

It may well be supposed this in no way tended to lessen the grief experienced at the loss she had sustained. The thought that her son, whom she had doted upon, and hoped would have been a comfort in her declining years, should

have disgraced his own and his father's good name, was madness to her, and for a time seemed likely to deprive her of her reason.

Her daughter Jennie was most assiduous in attending on her mother during this trying period; and her youth, coupled with a robust constitution, peculiarly fitted her for this task. For although feeling keenly the disgrace which her brother's conduct had brought upon the family, and the untimely end which had apparently overtaken him, she did not give way or break down after the manner of her mother, on whom the infirmities of advancing years were beginning to leave their mark.

By slow degrees she rallied, and was able again to resume her place in the household, but the old spirit had left her, so that she never seemed able to hold herself up as in former days.

Her neighbours and friends evinced much sympathy with her at her loss,—the true cause of the deep-seated grief they witnessed they were kept in ignorance of. The nights of agony spent in mourning over the frailties and faults of her boy—her darling boy!—not even her daughter knew anything about. She could not but note, however, how prematurely her mother was ageing, and it was with a painful sense of what might be before her that she contemplated, day after day, the tottering form, which seemed as if bowed down with the weight of years.

At Broadstone, the feeling of regret which at first prevailed when the tidings of young Sinclair's drowning was made known, had gradually given place to anger and resentment, when it ultimately became the topic of conversation that he had defrauded the firm of between four and five thousand pounds.

True, they scarcely felt the loss of that sum, since the amounts, as they were discovered, were simply made a matter of bookkeeping, for which a few entries in day book and ledger sufficed to transfer them to profit and loss account, and the thing was done with, so far as the business was concerned. Nevertheless the members of the firm had been disappointed by one on whom they had implicitly relied, and whom they had looked upon as the soul of honour. And, as time progressed, the reflex influence of this one man's actions was seen and felt by all, in the inauguration of a stricter discipline amongst the employés, and a more elaborate and, as it was regarded, a better system of account keeping being introduced, in order to maintain a closer check upon those who had the receiving and paying of money.

To the older men this was galling; but as younger men entered upon their duties, with little if any knowledge of what had preceded, they readily accommodated themselves to what was to them the natural order of things.

Perhaps it ought not to be wondered at if the firm should endeavour to find reasons for dispensing with the services of these older ones; and it might be that some such influence had been working to cause the changes which had been

taking place of late. Firms do but consist of human beings, after all, although they often seem to forget that those who serve them are human beings likewise.

If the same even-handed justice prevailed when no cloud flecked the horizon, as is meted out when turmoil reigns, there might be less cause of complaint. But with the cause the complaint must not be audible, as that would be to still further wreck the position and prospects of the unfortunate employé.

## CHAPTER XI.

### MANITOBA.

"I spake of most disastrous chances,
Of moving accidents...
Of hair-breadth scapes."—*Othello*, Act. I. sc. iii.

After their unfortunate experience in the city of Montreal, the Bartons lost no more time in looking about, but proceeded by the first outgoing train to the great North-West. Finding, however, before starting, that the money they now possessed would not be sufficient to carry them through and leave any cash in hand, they determined to break their journey somewhere beyond Winnipeg, and see if work could be found which would enable them to replenish their exchequer before venturing farther. Fortunately succeeding in effecting a change in their through tickets for the less distant city of Regina, they prepared to face a long day's ride. Travelling on the Canadian Pacific Railway is a luxurious procedure compared with that experienced on English lines and in many Continental cities, whilst the second-class corresponds with English first-class, with the advantage of being transformable into sleeping-cars at night.

The scenery from Montreal to the Pacific is some of the noblest and most varied the traveller can anywhere behold.

As he passes through the lovely Ottawa Valley, Toronto, which is the capital city of the Dominion, will be sure to attract attention; and, as he advances, the interest will deepen as he passes through the primeval forest, or past the primitive homes of frontier settlers.

The rail carries him along the shore of Lake Superior, the greatest freshwater lake on the face of the globe. And, until Fort William is reached, some very grand scenery is beheld.

Rock, stream, and lake succeed, or mingle with, each other for the next

three or four hundred miles, and receives an added interest from the fact that, besides being the route of the old fur-traders, it was also that by which our "One General" conducted the Red River Expedition of 1870.

The Red River Valley is now a populous settlement; crossing which, Winnipeg is entered, and the capital reached of the "world's great wheatfields of the future."

The province of Manitoba "is the most eastern division of the great prairie country," and its valleys are everywhere famous for the quality of its wheat. It is the older settled division of what was formerly known as Rupert's Land; its climate is extremely healthy, and is, in fact, looked upon as a health-resort in other parts of Canada.

Important and attractive as Winnipeg undoubtedly was, and influential as being the capital of the province, it was not considered by the Bartons to be the place most likely to meet their wants; hence their determination to travel on in order to reach a more agricultural station of the rural type, where they hoped there might be a possibility of obtaining work.

Passing a number of small towns and thriving settlements, where here and there might be found traces of the all but extinct buffalo, and occasionally catching a glimpse of an antelope, they had commenced the descent into the valley of the Qu'Appelle, and were rounding a rather sharp curve, when there burst on the engine-driver's view a heavily laden goods-train, in process of shunting, standing right across the path of the on-coming train. To shut off steam and reverse the brakes was the work of a few seconds; nevertheless the crash came, and at once a scene of dire confusion ensued. The driver lay dead beneath his overturned engine; the stoker had jumped off, and almost miraculously escaped with only a severe shaking and some few bruises. Two of the forward carriages were telescoped; others were heaped end-on companion carriages; two had been thrown over.

As soon as the uninjured portion of the passengers could free themselves from the carriages which had kept the rails, they set to work to rescue those who were screaming for succour, or moaning with pain, amidst the wreckage which plentifully bestrewed the lines.

In the course of a little less than an hour fourteen dead bodies were laid on the bank-side, and between fifty and sixty more or less fearfully injured passengers were extricated, of whom several, it was at once seen, were fatally injured.

Wolseley Station was within about one hundred yards of the accident, and thither the wounded were conveyed with all speed, whilst telegraphic messages were being rapidly sent up and down the line for every available medical man to be despatched on pilot engines, local trains, or in every possible way, to meet the urgent need.

The Bartons, fortunately, were in the hinder part of the train, and, with other passengers similarly circumstanced, with the exception of a good shaking were comparatively uninjured. These proved most indefatigable in helping the injured.

When tidings of the accident was wired to M'Lean Station, it happened to be the day that Ranger had gone over on business, and hearing the sad news he, without loss of time, drove down the line to Wolseley to see if he could be of any assistance; for, wherever the news had spread, the farmers and labourers were hastening in with all speed, knowing well that in such a district, and at such a time, all the help obtainable would be valuable. On his arrival he found the little station still in the greatest confusion, there not having yet been sufficient time to obtain the help needful to attend to the sufferers, let alone clear the line.

The less seriously injured were being conveyed to the nearest homesteads; whilst broken or damaged limbs were receiving such "first aid" as the appliances at hand and the intelligence of the rough but kind-hearted on-lookers suggested best to be done, until the surgeons summoned should arrive.

The dead had been carried into the goods-shed at the station, and reverently laid out to await the coroner's order for removal.

Presently, coming across the Bartons, he found them endeavouring to restore to consciousness a young woman apparently not more than twenty-five years of age, who had both legs broken.

By this time several medical men had arrived, including Dr. Fisherton, whom we last saw at Ranger's Ranch; and these were speedily fully occupied. When his attention could be arrested, Ranger secured his services for the young woman the Bartons were attending, and in the course of a short while they had the satisfaction of seeing her restored to consciousness, her limbs set and bandaged, and ready to be conveyed to some place for proper nursing.

In a number of cases this proved to be no easy task, since it involved being carried back to the hospital at Winnipeg; Portage, and other smaller towns, affording nothing like adequate accommodation for the many sufferers.

Ranger's trap being a commodious one, he expressed himself willing to take the young woman with the broken limbs to be nursed at his homestead, if the Bartons would ride with him and take all possible care to keep her from being jolted; providing Dr. Fisherton did not consider the journey too long and dangerous. Having given his consent to this arrangement, they all four started for his home. They necessarily had to proceed slowly, so that consequently the Ranch was not reached until late in the evening.

As soon as Mrs. Ranger learned what had happened, and the fresh demand that was to be made upon her domestic resources, she readily accommodated herself to the situation, and had the patient put in a comfortable bed. The Bartons

were provided with a shake-down on the floor, after first being supplied with a good supper.

Fellows, who when we last left him was in a state of delirium from the effects of the fire, had not yet returned to consciousness, although the virulence of the fever had somewhat abated.

There seemed, therefore, little prospect of much sleep for Mrs. Ranger that night, as the two alternately required much of her attention.

In the course of the next day Dr. Fisherton rode over to see the two patients, and to attend to their dressings; and from him they learned that four more of the injured had died, bringing up the number dead to eighteen; and that the coroner had arranged to hold his Court at M'Lean Station on the following day, a jury having been summoned for that purpose.

The inquiry, which was held in the goods-shed,—a sufficiently capacious building at M'Lean Station,—was chiefly devoted to a formal identification of the bodies, so as to render burial possible.

This, in all cases, was not an easy matter, but with the assistance afforded from papers found upon the deceased, and in one or two cases by the aid of relations travelling with them who had been saved, it was at length accomplished, and the coroner's order issued, permitting the funerals to take place.

As to the cause of the mischief, the testimony was not quite so clear; but the general opinion seemed to be that it was due to an error of judgment on the part of the signalman, in allowing the luggage train to be shunting at a time when the passenger train was so near due.

Eventually the Court stood adjourned for a week to admit of further evidence being adduced.

At the end of that period, when the jury reassembled, very little fresh light was thrown upon the case by the additional evidence produced; and the jury, whilst strongly condemning the carelessness of the signalman, which had undoubtedly been the cause of all the mischief, returned a verdict of accidental death.

Subsequently, an official inquiry was held by the C.P.R. Company, which ended in the signalman, who was deemed to blame, being dismissed the service.

A heavy bill of indemnity ultimately had to be faced, which the Company on the whole met and liquidated in a fairly generous spirit.

Whilst the inquest was pending, the Bartons found it impossible to leave the neighbourhood, as they were required to give evidence.

During their enforced stay at Farmer Ranger's, they had had frequent opportunities of canvassing their plans for the future with him.

His opinion coincided with their own, that it would be folly to attempt to penetrate into the Yukon with no better provision for their needs than what they

at present possessed.

He therefore arranged to give them work in the harvest-field at one dollar per day each, and their board, until means could be found for procuring them a small holding of their own, whilst acquiring the means for their journey, if so desired, into the Yukon.

Their next proceeding was to write home and inform Arnold of what had happened, and how they were at present circumstanced; the conclusion at which they had arrived being, that for the present they must give up all thoughts of going farther, and the realisation of their golden dreams would have to be indefinitely postponed.

This decision, as may well be imagined, was not arrived at without much discussion; and it was only after long reflection that they came to the conclusion to abandon the prospects they had in view.

It was a great blow to the sanguine hopes and expectations they had been indulging; but it was a condition of things they had been preparing themselves for since leaving Montreal, the scene of their misfortunes, which their own carelessness or thoughtlessness had so largely, if not entirely, contributed to.

Charles, the younger of the two, did suggest the thought of asking Arnold to advance them the money needed for the completion of their journey as originally mapped out; but the notion was one so repugnant to the feelings of the elder brother, and so stoutly resisted by him, that it was not pressed, and no hint was given in the letter subsequently written that any such desire prevailed.

## CHAPTER XII.

### A DREAM OF GOLD.

"...thou gaudy gold,
Hard food for Midas, I will none of thee."
*Merchant of Venice*, Act III. sc. ii.

Arnold's position was not one to be envied. For a flagrant misdemeanour he had been dismissed from Messrs. Quinion's London establishment, where he had been employed for many years. But with a display of energy, for the possession of which few had given him credit, he at once commenced business on his own account as an agent.

The letter which came to hand from his cousin Jack Barton, told of their

adventures in Montreal, their narrow escape from death at Manitoba, and their determination for the present to make their stay there, being under the necessity, through want of means, to abandon for a time their journey to the Klondyke.

Coming, as this letter did, at a time when his mind was so much exercised by events at home and his uncertain prospects for the future, it is not surprising if it revived thoughts, and imparted some life and vigour to aspirations and secretly cherished desires for a participation in some of those visions of wealth which from day to day the papers were revealing as amongst the things possible to men of energy and resource.

So much has been said and written, of late, as to the enormous riches of such regions as the Kootney, Cariboo, and the Klondyke, that, without disparaging in the least other regions of the Dominion, it is not surprising to find the eyes of thousands turned wistfully in their direction.

It was only a few days prior to the receipt of his cousin's letter that he had read in one of the papers a statement made by an ex-Mayor of Ottawa, to the effect "that the new Yukon goldfields were the richest the world has ever seen."

True, that which followed was calculated somewhat to damp the ardent enthusiast.

It was not pleasant to be told that "hundreds of the people who are now going there will be starved and frozen to death."

Some, however, would win success, and why not he?

What if he were to join his two cousins already on the way, help them to complete their arrested journey, and, by making one common cause, unite their forces, and perhaps succeed in winning a success eclipsing the dreams of the most avaricious!

It was a subject which he felt was one to be thought over, and not hastily decided upon.

The next letter to his cousin was one in which, with some amount of detail, he described the position in which he had unexpectedly found himself placed, and the thoughts, not yet matured, which he entertained of joining them. He closed his letter with the expression of a desire to hear from them on the subject.

The lapse of a month brought the expected reply, strongly advising him to join them, and proposing that if he did so, and found the means for all to go forward, they would consent to his receiving a half share of whatever was realised, they taking the remaining half between them.

The proposal seemed eminently fair, so that it only remained for him to well consider the situation before him, and whether the ways and means could be procured for the undertaking.

His wife, who had not been informed of the plan lie was contemplating, had yet to be won over to his views. This proved not so easy a matter as he had

dared to hope.

To the woman's mind the journey was fraught with risks and dangers which far outweighed whatever possibility might exist of realising the golden dreams, which at present, at all events, were too far distant for serious contemplation.

Furthermore, to say nothing of the toils and hardships he would have to face, and which she was fain to believe he was not man enough to endure, she wanted to know how long he expected to be away, and what he proposed for her and the children to do until his return.

So far as his own powers of endurance were concerned, he told her, he had no fears; and was prepared to face all the terrors and hardships of the journey, as well as the risks and dangers, in the search for gold.

The question of her own and the children's subsistence during his absence he confessed he had not carefully gone into, as he first wanted to get at a general expression of her views before considering what really was the most difficult aspect of the subject.

"I understand your mother is coming this afternoon; so suppose we leave the matter as it stands at present, that you may talk it over with her, hear what she has to say, and then when I come home we can go more fully into it together."

On his return in the evening, he was quickly informed that the two women regarded the scheme as being altogether a mad and impracticable proposal; one which no sensible married man ought for a moment to entertain.

Nor, if the truth were told, did Arnold himself quite see how the thing could be accomplished.

The main difficulty was how to provide for his family during an almost two years necessary absence. His wife's mother could have rendered this part of the task easy enough, had she been so disposed; but since no such proposal came from her, he himself was not willing to suggest it.

For the present, therefore, the idea was abandoned, and in the course of a week or two he wrote his cousins, stating fully the difficulties as they had presented themselves, and explaining that the financial bogey alone rendered it impossible for him to undertake the exploit, and that it was with infinite regret he had been compelled to that conclusion.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### BROADSTONE LIBERALS.

"Now, afore heaven, 'tis shame such wrongs are borne."
*Richard II.*, Act II. sc. i.

A parliamentary election was pending at Broadstone, through the decease of one of its sitting members.

The several election agents were busy marshalling their forces, in readiness for what it was believed would be a sharp contest. Party clubs were rallying their members, so that each club might bring forward the strongest possible candidate it could find. The local press were putting out feelers as to this man and that man's suitability, evidently with no very definite notion as to which of those named the choice was likely to fall upon.

Energetic correspondents were at work detailing to an open-mouthed clientele that So-and-so was being approached with a view to stand, only to furnish a paragraph for the next day's issue to the effect that the intelligence so reported was premature or unfounded.

The Radical caucus at length brought out their man in the person of Mr. E. Quinion, who was declared to be the "Working-Man's Friend," the foe to all tyranny and oppression, the advocate of Home Rule, and the extension of the popular vote. The Conservative party showed themselves equally eager for the political fray, declaring that their man was a staunch supporter of the rights of labour, but a determined opponent of Home Rule.

Canvassers began to be busy, meetings were arranged for, and the leading men from the London clubs were sent down to aid the cause of the candidates by their floods of eloquence.

As much of the rank and file of each party as could be usefully and judiciously employed was freely pressed into service. The Conservative agent having by some means got wind of Roberts and his grievance, invited him down to a meeting at Broadstone of the working-men, where, with several others, he was announced as a former employé of the great house of H. & E. Quinion.

Not being a trained speaker, but a man nervous as to his own capabilities, and without experience of an election audience, he felt that he had undertaken a risky business, and therefore it was with considerable apprehension he ventured to face a somewhat noisy assemblage, in a crowded hall, in a quarter of the city tenanted chiefly by the working classes.

Commencing in a low key at first, he was very soon met with exclamations from various parts of the hall of "What is thee afraid of?" "Speak up, mon!" "Hold thy head up!" which, instead of disconcerting, seemed to kindle what little fire there was in him, so that, in a voice which was heard at the other end of the hall, he cried out—

"Men of Broadstone, listen to me! The issue you are called upon to decide is an all important one, inasmuch as it affects not you only but the country at large. You have to decide which of two men is the most fitting to represent your interests in the Parliament of the nation. And it is with regard to one of these that I am chiefly concerned this evening. Your Radical friends have brought forward one they describe as 'The Working-Man's Friend'" (a voice, "So he is!"—Loud cheers). "Well, I shall be content if you will decide that question when I have finished. Nearly thirty years ago I entered the service in London of the firm of which he is a member, serving them faithfully and well, as letters in my possession will show. During that period they paid me well, and treated me fairly, and to that extent I have no fault to find with them. Whilst in their service I was the means of detecting successively six men who were robbing them. Two were at once sent away; one fled, and was never again heard of; one died whilst inquiry was pending; and the other two, at my instigation, were forgiven and retained.

"But what happened to me? At the end of nearly thirty years, I was given a month's notice to leave, and on inquiring the reason was told they had no fault to find with me, but they wanted to make certain changes which rendered this course necessary.

"Another man, who had served as long as I had done, and with an equally clean bill of health, was similarly treated. And when the gentleman who now wants to pose as the Working-Man's Friend was spoken to, as to the injustice of retaining a man in their employ who had been detected robbing them, and sending away honest men, with no flaw in their characters, at an age, and after such a lengthened period of service, when it would be quite impossible for them to obtain employment elsewhere,—I say, when your Working-Man's Friend was told this, he simply shrugged his shoulders and said 'he was sorry'!

"How did he manifest it? I asked him to reinstate me, but he declared that could not be done. I suggested that he ought to pension me! But the idea was not entertained.

"Two men in London were retained who were known to be 'lushers,' and did eventually drink themselves to death. One was frequently so intoxicated during business that he has been seen to sprawl his length across the showroom, and to be picked up almost helpless. After receiving notice to leave he managed to overcome the scruples of the firm, so that he was eventually retained, and gradually lapsed into his old ways, which ultimately were the death of him. This, I suppose, is what he calls being the Working-Man's Friend! I could mention other cases, but it seems to me that these are—or ought to be—enough to show that the man who wishes to be thought your friend has such a doubtful record that you will do well, before you decide to give him your votes, to put a few questions to him concerning the facts I have so imperfectly endeavoured to present to your

notice."

When Roberts sat down, after comparing and commenting upon the political programme of the two candidates, it was with a round of applause uninterrupted by any opposing sound, and it was soon evident that an impression had been produced most unfavourable for the Radical candidate.

Much capital was subsequently made of the facts and statements uttered by Roberts, and an unusual amount of election literature was the outcome.

Efforts were made by the other side to deny the facts as stated, but without success.

He was prevented by the circumstances of the case from publishing the names of the individuals referred to, but particulars of these were supplied by him to the candidate, rendering it possible to verify the truth or falsity of his statement.

His efforts during the progress of the election, together with those of the party he was associated with, resulted in the triumphant return of the Tory candidate by a big majority, much to the chagrin and bitter disappointment of Mr. Quinion and his friends.

Privately, he was heard to say that had he anticipated the advent of Roberts into the fray, he would never have come forward to contest the seat, and Roberts' coming was not made known until it was too late for him to withdraw.

Flushed with the result of his efforts at Broadstone, Roberts returned to town, hoping, although scarcely expecting, that he might hear something from Mr. Quinion with regard to the statements he had made whilst on the stump.

He knew him to be a man who prided himself on his public reputation for fair dealing, and as this had been seriously impugned, he would not have been surprised had he received such a communication.

But the Oracle remained dumb, and Roberts' prospects did not improve; so that in a little while it threatened to become a serious question in what way he was to keep the wolf from the door.

He was told, however, on reliable authority, that one of the members of the firm had been heard to say he was very sorry they had been induced to make the changes complained of—it was no doubt a mistake, but it was too late now to rectify, as they dare not contemplate recalling their acts or retracing their steps. For good or ill, a certain course had been marked out, and it must be pursued.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## CONVALESCENTS.

"Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie,
Which we ascribe to heaven."
*All's Well that Ends Well*, Act I. sc. i.

During the months which had intervened since we last followed the fortunes of our friends at the Ranch, events had been moving forward most favourably.

Fellows had so far recovered that he was now able to resume work, and but for the scars of the burns received, which were still visible on face and hands, there was little outwardly to denote the terrible sufferings he had gone through.

The young woman who had suffered so severely in the fatal railway collision was just capable of getting about, but the doctor said it would yet be some time before she acquired the full use of her limbs.

To lighten the arduous duties of Mrs. Ranger, which the care and attention needed by the invalids had necessarily thrown upon her, the services of Russell's daughter, so opportunely rescued by Fellows, were called in, and proved a most invaluable aid.

Miss Russell, to whom Sir Walter Scott's descriptive line might well have been applied, "Sweet was her blue eye's modest smile," was a remarkably intelligent young woman, scarcely nineteen, who three years before, on the death of her mother, had emigrated with her father, and found employment at Farmer Ranger's Ranch. She was not regarded as a field-hand, but employed in domestic and home duties, which, properly attended to, were sufficient to occupy the major portion of her time, leaving little to be wasted in idleness.

A fresh hut or shanty had very speedily been raised upon the site of the one destroyed by the fire, and Russell had resumed his old habits.

The attention which her father's home required, and the duties she was called upon to discharge at the homestead, fully occupied all the hours of the day at her disposal, besides making frequent inroads upon those which should have been reserved for repose.

Yet, notwithstanding these demands, she still found it possible to have an occasional chat with Fellows, a strong friendship having sprung up between the two during the period of her attendance, whilst he was being nursed back to convalescence, and which promised to ripen into a closer attachment still.

A dwelling had been raised for the Bartons some few yards from the homestead itself, in which they had been comfortably installed, whilst awaiting the result of their correspondence with Arnold in London.

When the letter from Arnold arrived, the contents of which has already been indicated, it created a profound feeling of disappointment and regret.

From the tenor of his previous communications they had been led to hope for a very different result, and in anticipation of a rather early forward movement had allowed their imagination freer play than was perhaps good for them. The disappointment was, therefore, all the keener when this letter reached them, which at one blow shattered the structures their fancy had been at such pains to elaborate.

After carefully considering their position, and the funds still at their disposal, they held a consultation with Ranger as to the course it would be best to adopt. That advice was readily given.

"A little capital," said he, "makes the start easier, and saves valuable time. But I have known many men do without it. Hundreds have arrived in these parts without any capital whatever, and by first working for wages have prospered and become substantial farmers. My advice to you, therefore, would be, don't be in a hurry, but continue to keep your eyes and ears open, and in the event of any suitable homestead being obtainable, let me know, and we may be able to so arrange matters as to secure it for you. And whatever you do, don't let the Klondyke craze divert your mind from that which is possible and within comparatively easy reach."

The two men thanked Ranger very heartily for his advice, and promised to think over what he had said.

"I don't understand how Jim managed to make such a fool of us as well as himself," remarked the elder Barton, when, seated smoking their pipes at the door of their hut, in the cool of the evening, they discussed the events of the day.

"Nor I," said his brother.

"Very likely, however, his wife wouldn't hear of his going away."

"That may have had a great deal to do with it."

"It's very disappointing, as it seems to me we shall be forced to act upon Ranger's advice."

"Which, of course, means that we must give up all idea of getting out to the Klondyke."

"Does that follow, Charley, as a matter of course?"

"I think so, Jack; for if we get settled here on our own location, it will not be so easy to throw that up and run off."

Farmer Ranger's education as a youth had been sadly neglected, and in later years he missed much of that enjoyment which is theirs who have a well-trained or a stored mind.

As a boy he was sent to the village school, where he was introduced into some of the mysteries of the three "R's," but the death of his father, when he was quite young, compelled his mother to send him into the fields to maintain the home over their heads. Subsequently, for a brief period, he went to the parish

school on Sunday, where, after the appointed lesson in the Bible had been read, the remainder of the time was usually given up to some goody-goody story, which the children regarded as the most interesting feature.

As may be judged, his secular and religious knowledge were of a very limited character, and when he left school it was with no very exalted conceptions of the value of the education he had received.

One habit, however, was formed by his attendance at the parish school,—which grew with his growth,—and that was the daily reading of the Bible. Whatever else was neglected, this he was never known to omit. He had never been in the habit of attending church or chapel, and since his arrival in the regions of the "Wild West" such a thing as a clergyman, or a preacher of any description, was a rarity. But he was a man of good moral principles, one who never sought to obtain the best of a bargain by any underhand methods, ever ready to do unto others as he wished others to do to him.

He loved his neighbour as himself, nor stayed to inquire "Who is my neighbour?" He had but to be shown the need, to render all the help it was in his power to give.

His wife, having been a farmer's daughter, had proved herself in every way adapted for the kind of life they had adopted.

"Well, so long as we continue to work for the farmer, we had better be as economical as possible; save all we can, and then, when the time or opportunity arrives, and a suitable homestead is to be had, we can determine whether to put what we possess into it and settle down to a farmer's life, or if we shall endeavour to make a push and get through to the Yukon."

"Meanwhile, I don't think we could do better than stay where we are and work for Ranger, who seems a thoroughly honest fellow."

Ranger had been located at Qu'Appelle about eight seasons.

Originally a farm-bailiff for a small landed proprietor in North Devon, he had, together with his wife and a son and daughter, determined to try his fortune in the North-West of America. After realising the little property he possessed, he found that he had in hard cash close upon one hundred and twenty pounds.

Being attracted by the general features and local surroundings of the lovely valley of the Qu'Appelle, he was fortunately able, in those early days, to secure a section of land owned by the railway company, not very distant from the railway, by which means increased facilities were afforded for marketing his produce.

Commencing with what is known as a quarter section—one hundred and sixty acres—he had gradually increased his holding, until now he was the proprietor of six hundred and forty acres of some of the finest land to be found in America.

At no period over-burdened with serviceable and experienced hands, he

was generally open to avail himself of a favourable offer of help when it presented itself.

The Bartons, with their Old World experience, were additions he was very ready to welcome, and to find them suitable remunerative occupation.

Harvesting, which begins about the middle of August and ends early in September, was nearly over; and the young woman rescued from the railway accident had made such good progress towards convalescence that she was now able to get about and make herself useful.

The farmer and his wife had frequently, of late, taken the opportunity of discussing with her of an evening, when the work of the day was over, the future and its prospects, without being able to arrive at any very satisfactory conclusion.

Her case was a peculiarly sad one. When the accident overtook her, of which she was so unfortunate a sufferer, she was travelling in the company of an uncle and his two sons, who contemplated settling in the neighbouring province of Alberta.

She was anticipating being married shortly to one of her cousins, in the event of everything turning out favourable; but to her inexpressible grief she was informed, as soon as recovery had sufficiently advanced to render such a communication safe, that all three had been killed; so that she was now alone, in a strange land, without a friend save those who had so kindly acted the part of "Good Samaritan."

Although for a time the consequences of such a revelation seemed likely to be serious, youth and a good constitution in the end triumphed, and she began to regain a little of that buoyancy and activity which those who had known her would have expected her to display.

But the memory of those dear to her, of whom she had been so suddenly and painfully bereaved, could not be so easily effaced; and the languor of her manners, and the melancholy expression which in hours of idleness would steal over her, sufficiently served to mark the influence which reflection was bound to exert, and the grief too deep for utterance which remained.

The railway company had arranged to make ample provision for her, so that little concern was felt on that score; but for the present it was undecided what course it would be best for her to pursue.

In the unsettled, or only half settled, districts of the great North-West, where woman, if not a minus quantity, is very often in many parts a *rara avis*, the advent of one is always regarded with marked attention and considerable interest.

Under any circumstances Mary Truman would have been a welcome guest at Farmer Ranger's, whilst from the unfortunate nature of her surroundings she was now made to feel doubly welcome.

To the elder Barton, it was very easy to be seen, she had become an object of peculiar interest, but her sorrow and suffering were yet of too recent a date to admit of much safe speculation with regard to the future.

## CHAPTER XV.

### NAT LANGHAM'S.

"You wrong me, sir, thus still to haunt my house."

*Merry Wives of Windsor*, Act III. sc. iv.

It is not so many years ago that the lands through which the lines of the Great Trunk Railway of Canada run, after leaving Winnipeg, away up to Calgary in the "Rockies," were the happy hunting-grounds of the Cree and Blackfeet Indians. Now the traveller sees little besides a number of small towns and thriving settlements, all along the line.

Occasionally a nondescript representative of the almost extinct races may be observed, disillusioning the mind of the beholder of whatever romantic notions he may have imbibed from the pages of Fenimore Cooper. But away in the hills, or out on the more distant prairies, where even if the pioneer has ventured the settler has not yet attempted to follow, encampments of these "children of nature" still exist.

And it is only at extremely rare intervals that we hear of them being upon the "war path."

Like the buffalo he was wont to hunt, or the aboriginal Australian, the North-American Indian promises soon to be but a figure of history.

Amongst the foot-hills of the "Rockies," as well as in the glens and valleys amid the higher peaks, and secluded amongst the hills and woods which abound in the far interior, down through the provinces of Alberta, Assiniboia, Saskatchewan, to Manitoba, roving bands of lawless men are to be found, guided occasionally by one or more of what are known as "half-breeds" or native scouts, who, if not the last of their race, are more frequently for some delinquency the outcasts of their tribes.

The cattle-lifting frays of these bands of desperadoes are dreaded events in the lives of the peaceably disposed settlers, their tracks being generally marked by the destruction and ruin of happy homesteads, and the murder of their defenceless occupants.

Only recently a raid had been made on a settlement at the foot of the Beaver Hills, some distance to the north of Ranger's homestead, but sufficiently near to set him on the alert, and give rise to some anxiety for his own safety as well as the lives of the many dependent upon him.

The mounted police—a thoroughly efficient and well-organised body—had been scouring the country in all directions, in hopes of striking the trail of this band of marauders, but hitherto to little effect.

Nat Langham's Store, in the neighbourhood of the Pleasant Hills, was a well-known place of resort for the miners and lumber-men for miles round. He was said to have been a prize-fighter in his time, and thither all the loafers and idlers and the ne'er-do-wells, which ever hang on to the skirts of a community, were in the habit of gathering.

Drinking, betting, and gambling were the order of the day—and night too. And many were the scenes of riot and bloodshed which had been witnessed at his store.

Being the only store where liquor could be obtained, and play of a certain kind indulged in, it was freely resorted to by most of that class whose tastes led them in the direction of what was known as conviviality and sport.

The police, when in search of information, or for doubtful or dangerous characters, were frequent visitors at his shanty.

The recent raid in the vicinity of the Beaver Hills had woke up the slumbering zeal of the authorities to increased activity and watchfulness, and their attention of late to this particular locality had been of a very marked character.

One of the most successful of the small but energetic little band of the police stationed at Wolseley was a man named "Puffey," from a habit he had acquired of inflating his cheeks, until they stood up in hillocks on each side of a little red snub nose, looking for all the world like a well-rounded Burgundy bottle with its red sealed cork flanked by the dark ruby of the glass.

Although the butt of his companions, he was a good-tempered little fellow, ever ready to render effective aid when called upon, but whose kindness of heart often threatened to override his judgment, or to play havoc with the discretion which at times it was needful to exercise. He was a man in the prime of life, not more than thirty-four or thirty-five years of age; strong, wiry, and active, with a pair of small, keen grey eyes, whose steady gaze were capable of reading character, to the confusion of many an ill-conditioned ruffian and the upsetting of his well-considered plans.

Formerly a member of the detective force in England, on migrating to the States, after a short but not very successful career in New York, he had crossed the border, and soon found ready employment in the ranks of the mounted police, where his reputation had been steadily growing for some years past.

It was a dull chilly day towards the close of September, as late one afternoon he dismounted at the door of Langham's shanty, and giving his horse into the charge of a slim youth, who had emerged from the dwelling on hearing the sounds of an approaching horseman, with the laconic remark of "Stable him, my lad," entered through the public-room, where Nat Langham was to be seen behind a roughly constructed bar, possessing none of those outward attractions which are found so alluring to the denizens of our big cities and towns.

The conversation, which had been noisy and general, was hushed as soon as it began to be whispered who the new-comer was.

Casting a careless glance around, but a glance which enabled him to rapidly survey the assembled groups, with a nod to Langham he passed on into a small room on the right of the bar, in which were seated a few of the more select spirits of the neighbourhood.

The men were engaged in the exciting game of "Poker," and as they glanced up for a moment on his entry, one of them shouted—

"Hullo, Puffey! What's up?"

"Not much yet," the officer replied.

"Who do you want?" was the next inquiry.

"No one here."

"That's all right. Have a drink?" was the prompt rejoinder.

That he was well known might have been inferred from the fact of all three offering him glasses. Having drunk with them on the score of good fellowship, and called for the glasses to be refilled, he sat down at an unoccupied corner of the table, and lighting a small briar pipe, which by its appearance looked to have been in constant demand for some time, he prepared to watch the game going on.

Two of the men were apparently stockmen, and hailed from a Ranch a few miles distant; the other was an engineer in the employ of the railway company.

"Puffey," or to give him his proper name as it appeared on the books of the force, John Stone, sat for some time apparently watching the play of the three men, but in reality listening to the sounds proceeding from the bar, which could be plainly heard in the room in which they were seated.

Presently, arousing himself, and addressing the players, he inquired—

"Seen anyone looking round lately, Sam?"

"A couple of trappers came over from Indian Head two days ago."

"Where did they hail from?"

"The Wood Hills."

"What sort did they look?"

"One was a dark man, with great black eyes, a large beard, and a nose like a Jew's; he was about my own height, five foot ten or thereabouts. His companion

was rather shorter, looked pale and sickly, as if a meal or two would not be thrown away upon him; and both were under forty years old."

"Bravo, Sam! you'll make a good 'tec in time."

"Why, do you know them?" said Sam, with a surprised look.

"Know them? I should think I do! Your description fits the men I want to a T."

The three men stopped their game, whilst he who had been addressed as Sam, and had saluted the officer as "Puffey," inquired—

"Who are they?"

For answer, Stone asked, "Did you hear about the murder at the Beaver Hills?"

"Yes; my mate was telling me all about it only last night."

"Old Robson and his two sons made a plucky stand, but the band was too strong for them."

"Were all three of them killed?"

"They set fire to the homestead, and when the flames at length compelled them to fly they were shot down like rabbits."

"What became of the two women?"

"They were fortunately away on a visit to a friend at Wolseley, and did not return that night."

"They succeeded in driving away about forty head of cattle, which have been traced into the neighbourhood of the Touchwood Hills."

"But," said Sam, after a pause, "what has this to do with the two men we were talking about?"

"Everything," responded Stone. "Perhaps you have heard of the Warple Band?"

"To be sure I have."

"Well, the Warple Band are believed to have been for some time located in the 'Touchwood'; and now I feel certain about it, for the description you gave of the two men who were here answers exactly to that which I have obtained of the two leaders, from one of whom it gets its name."

"Do you think so?"

"I don't think at all about it—I'm certain!" added Stone, as he brought his fist down on the table with a thump.

"Well, what will be your next move then?"

"Ah! that remains to be seen," he added, with a far-away look in his eyes.

"Well, certainly appearances are deceiving, for I should never have taken the two fellows, who, as I told you, looked like trappers, to be the desperate characters you say they are."

"No; and yet they are wanted for some of the foulest and darkest of crimes."

"What are you going to do to-night?" asked Sam.

"I shall return at once to Wolseley and report."

Calling to Langham, he bade that worthy have his horse saddled and brought round at once; and, having settled his score, bade good-night to the friends he was leaving, and taking a good look round the drinking-bar as he passed through, he mounted his horse, and rode off into the fast gathering darkness.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE WARPLE BAND.

"These high wild hills, and rough uneven ways,
Draw out our miles, and make them wearisome."—
*Richard II.*, Act. II. sc. iii.

In the course of the ensuing week the farmers and ranchers for miles round had notice from the police of the district of their intention to raid the Touchwood Hills, in search of a nest of robbers believed to be hiding there.

The settlers were directed to assemble at a point named, at a certain hour, on a given day, with all the able-bodied men they could muster capable of bearing arms, and to be prepared for what might probably prove a stiffish job.

Early in the morning of the day appointed, a special train, which started from Winnipeg the previous day, and calling at the various stations on its way up had entrained detachments of mounted police, reached M'Lean Station with a force of fifty horsemen, which was at once sent forward across the prairie to the place of rendezvous.

After advancing about ten miles, they halted on the banks of a running stream, so as to give the farmers who were expected to join them an opportunity of coming on.

Some they found already at the place appointed, and others, by twos and threes, kept dropping in, until by noon they had assembled about one hundred and twenty all told.

The farmers, with their men, were in many cases as well mounted as the police; their uniform and discipline differed, but in other respects they looked equal to any amount of fatigue, and capable of holding their own and rendering good service to the force they were about to accompany.

Twenty-five of the police were sent on a little in advance, followed by their ambulance waggons and staff, under the command of Captain Lean; the yeomanry—for such they might be termed—formed the centre, followed by their waggons, which were made to serve for ambulance purposes, and were placed under the direction of Fellows from Ranger's Ranch, who, by training and experience acquired as an officer in a Volunteer corps in England, it was considered, might safely be entrusted with that important command. The rear was brought up by the remainder of the police; the whole force being commanded by Major Scott, a man who had seen much service in the "States," was well acquainted with Indian tactics, and had frequently been employed in border forays, and that guerilla style of fighting, the men they were now in search of were likely to indulge in.

Having accomplished another fifteen miles of their journey, they halted at the edge of a wood and prepared to make such dispositions for a night on the plains as their resources would admit of, due precautions being taken to guard against a night surprise, which, however, did not take place.

They were stirring with sunrise; and after watering and feeding their horses, and supplying their own wants, they saddled up, and with military precision were ready to start by eight o'clock, in the same order as on the previous day.

No incident of importance occurred to mark their progress, and as the second day began to close in they reckoned to be within about ten miles of their destination.

Arrived on the bank of a small river, which, besides affording water for both man and beast, in other respects seemed suitable for camping purposes, a halt was sounded, fires lighted, and preparations soon in progress for a good meal and a night's repose.

Up to the present they had met with little difficulty in following in the trail of the raiders, which was well marked.

The Major's plan, as communicated to his lieutenants, was, if the trail continued, to advance up to the foothills of the Touchstone, and then, at suitable points to be selected, plant small bodies of the force at his disposal round the base of the hill, which at a fixed hour were to advance up the slopes, passing over intervening valleys or depressions, to the centre, where the whole would be expected to assemble.

Before eight o'clock the next morning the little force was on the move, silent, and alert for the developments of the next few hours.

After the lapse of about three hours they came to a spot covered with thick clumps of trees, bordering a lake nearly a mile in extent from east to west. The intervening spaces were uneven and billowy, running into deep depressions cov-

ered with heavy luxuriant grasses. The hill they were making for was plainly visible in the distance, and had been for some time.

Major Scott, halting his force here, resolved to await the return of a scout sent on in advance two days previous, with orders to penetrate into the recesses of the hill, and learn, if possible, the number and location of the enemy. Vedettes were assigned to positions, and no precautions neglected which might prevent a possible, yet not an expected, surprise.

Scarcely had these dispositions been arranged, when the return of the scout was announced, and in a few minutes, without much ceremony, he made his way into the presence of the Major, who was seated on an upturned camp-kettle.

"Well, sonny, what success?" he cried out.

"You shall hear, Major. It was a dark night when I reached the foot-hills, which, for my purpose, was fortunate. Making my way as cautiously as possible through the pines and cedars, and the masses of thickly-growing fern which are abundant there, in a short while I found myself overlooking a grass-covered glade of some extent, at the extremity of which the face of the hill seemed to rise sheer and steep for hundreds of feet. Seated round a bivouac fire, engaged in an animated conversation, were a dozen men, with their blankets over their shoulders. They were rough-bearded looking fellows with one exception, and he had all the appearance of a half-breed; and no doubt was, as I took him to be, the guide of the band. Their feet were encased in moccasins, and provided with big rowelled spurs. A similar number of horses were not far distant, hobbled, Indian fashion, with strips of hide.

"From the conversation, which reached me but indistinctly, I gathered that four of the band were doing duty as sentries, making sixteen in all. They were all fully armed with pistols and knives and Winchesters. No signs of cattle were visible. They did not seem to be under any fear of a surprise; and as there appeared to be little further to learn I hastened back as rapidly as possible."

The band was smaller than the Major had expected, he therefore resolved to move forward at once.

Dividing his force into four sections, he directed one to proceed to the west, and another to the east, and each to penetrate the hill until they met. A third section was directed to skirt the hill until they faced its northern side, and then, in like manner, ascend, until they met the two flanking columns, when they would unite and advance south until they came across the band, or met his column, which would move up in time to join them.

Whilst the three columns were making a detour round the hill to reach the posts assigned, the Major resolved to wait where he was at present, until daylight was on the wane, to give time for each to be well advanced before he attempted to move forward, and so possibly the better escape detection by any watchful eye

which might be on the look-out for the unexpected.

The day wore to its close. The sky was obscured with dense masses of heavy clouds, indicating a coming storm. The waning moon would not make its appearance yet for some hours. The occasional rumble of distant thunder was to be heard, whilst vivid flashes of lightning from time to time lit up the wide expanse, only to render the succeeding darkness the more intense.

Favoured by the elements, Major Scott cautiously but steadily advanced his little force until they were close up to the ascent of the hill, but well screened by the wild luxuriance of the vegetation, the growth of ages, as yet undisturbed by the demands or needs of man, or the onward march of those civilising forces which are ever working for the advancement of the race.

Pulling their blankets around them, his men bivouacked where they had halted, to snatch a few hours' repose, in order that they might be the better prepared to face what was before them.

A little more than an hour had passed when the distant sounds of rifle-firing came echoing down the hill, which no sooner reached the slumbering groups than Major Scott gave the signal, and his bugler sounded the call to arms, and in a very brief space of time his little party was up, saddled, and in motion at a brisk trot.

Guided by the information which their scout had brought them,—and who was now to the front, with the Major, leading,—they soon reached the spot described by him, where he had seen the band encamped.

Save the dying embers of a solitary fire, the darkness was too profound to render objects visible at a distance. Nor could they detect the sounds of any life present, except those which came from their own party.

As the men moved across the plain, the horse of one stumbled over an object in the darkness, which its rider, on dismounting, found was the body of a man apparently lifeless, indicating that the firing which had aroused them must have been in this locality, and that the place could only recently have been abandoned.

In a few moments their attention was arrested by the sounds of approaching horsemen, and an occasional shot being fired.

That familiarity with darkness which renders objects at first all but invisible gradually distinguishable through the gloom, had enabled Scott and his contingent with some degree of certainty to fix their surroundings, as well as to form a tolerable conception of their position.

Directing a trooper to sound a bugle blast, it was answered by one from the advancing party, and in a short while they could distinguish the figures of men and horses as they came round a bend of the hill to the left of where they had halted.

In answer to the Major's challenge, these forces were soon discovered to

be the two divisions which had ascended to the hill on its eastern and western slopes.

It appeared that, warned of the danger with which they were threatened, the band had fled before they could reach them, but from sheltered clefts in the hills above they had kept up a desultory fire upon their pursuers, without exposing themselves to danger.

It would have been useless in the darkness to endeavour to search for a concealed foe well acquainted with the ground, to which they were comparative strangers, exposing themselves to chance shots which they might possibly be in no condition to return.

They were compelled, however, to await the arrival of the fourth division of their force, which, advancing by the northern slope, owing to the longer distance to be covered, might yet be some time before reaching the appointed rendezvous.

An hour went by, when from the other side of the hill there came faint sounds of a rifle discharge, repeated at more frequent intervals.

Turning in the direction from which they proceeded, and putting their horses to the trot, Major Scott's division, reinforced by the other two bands, made such haste as the nature of the ground to be traversed, and the dim light to guide them, would permit, in order to reach their comrades, who appeared to have met with the band of outlaws.

Aided by rifts in the clouds overhead, through which "the stars in their courses" occasionally looked down, rendering objects slightly less obscure than during the earlier hours of the night, they were able to make fair progress.

But the country being so well covered with clumps of pine and maple, spruce and cedar, and the dense bush and scrub, with hundreds of interlacing creeping plants making up a tangled mass difficult to penetrate, speed had frequently to be slackened until a passage could be found, or forced, through the obstructions which nature with such prodigality and lavishness had spread in their path.

Emerging at length on to a spacious plateau, they found themselves facing a series of well-wooded terraces, from which, however, they were separated by a deep ravine, now dry, but in the rainy season the source of drainage from the hills to the plains.

As they came into the open they saw before them, in the dim and uncertain light of early day, Red Dick and his lawless band of followers spread out at the edge of the plateau, taking pot-shots at their pursuers, just discernible on the terraced slopes the other side of the ravine.

Bold and reckless as Dick's band was reputed to be, they felt that they were now in what might be called "a tight fix."

With an impassable gorge in front, and a rapidly advancing force in their

rear, their only chance left was to gain a narrow winding pathway in the face of the hill which led down into the bed of the ravine.

The alternative was to throw up the sponge and to allow themselves to be taken prisoners, but as that meant certain death, since their many crimes had long since placed them beyond all claims to mercy, they determined to make a virtue of necessity, and run. Two were shot down in attempting to reach the descending path; one missed his footing and was dashed headlong to the bottom; whilst the fourth was fatally wounded by a shot from the opposite side of the ravine.

Parties of mounted men were at once despatched to try and intercept the escape of the fugitives at each end of the bed of the torrent.

They were successful to the extent of making two captures, but when it was discovered that one of these was no less a personage than the redoubtable Red Dick himself, the entire party felt that all their efforts had been well rewarded.

When the roll was called, five of the constabulary were reported killed and eleven wounded; whilst of the farmers one had been killed and seven wounded.

With the capture of the leader of this desperate band, the chief object of the foray had been attained; it was therefore considered useless to delay the return in the hope of securing the remainder of the outlaws.

The return was accomplished without incident, and the two prisoners safely lodged at Regina, to await instructions from Ottawa.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### A CONFESSION.

"My life upon her faith."—*Othello*, Act I. sc. iii.

To the average man, woman is a riddle. Her ways are past finding out.

Without doubt, the noble deeds of women are not always those which are blazoned forth to the public eye in books and pamphlets, or by means of the press.

The quiet, unobtrusive host of duties they perform in the midst of unheard-of difficulties; their patient endurance of suffering; the privations they are willing to undergo for those they love; the obscurity and loneliness in which much of their lives are passed, yet the unmurmuring and ungrudging way in which devoted service is given: all this is known to the few, and has yet to be revealed.

It was probably due to one or more of these phases or traits of character, which the illness of Fellows had developed in Jessie Russell, that had caused the

feeling of friendship he imagined he entertained for her to reveal itself to him as that of a much warmer and tenderer attachment, which might more properly be attributed to one of those well-directed shafts from Cupid's artillery which the little god, with so much precision, is so well able and so ready to discharge.

Fellows was in love with Jessie Russell. He had to admit that to himself, and he was longing to confess it to her.

But whenever the occasion presented itself—and opportunities occurred in abundance—remorse restrained him and kept him silent. Dare he link her future with one whose past was a record of shame and crime? If she cared for him—as he sometimes flattered himself she did—need he trouble her with that which could not possibly do her any good, and might do much harm?

Whatever may have been the follies and sins of his past life, his moral perceptions were still keen enough to see that such a course of conduct would be most dishonouring and dishonourable to the woman he professed to have a supreme regard for.

Thoughts such as these naturally cast a shadow over his life; he avoided the society of his fellows, or, when circumstances compelled him to associate with them, he was moody, taciturn, and reserved, so that in the house or in the field his converse or communications were of the briefest, and marked by no feature to lead to its continuance.

His habits and general demeanour had not escaped the notice of Mrs. Ranger, and, with that womanly intuitiveness so characteristic of the sex, she had not been long in divining the cause.

Taking advantage of an opportunity one evening when alone together, and the work of the day was over, she mentioned the subject to her husband.

"Have you noticed how quiet and reserved our chap Fellows has been lately?"

"Yes, I have, Bess; it seems difficult to get a word out of him."

"What do you suppose to be the cause?"

"Well, I have thought at times he was in love with that girl of Russell's."

"And if he is, I can't see the reason for his going about moping as he appears to be doing."

"Nor can I; although I know how hard it is to understand the goings on of two people in love."

"I'm sure it's not because there is any difficulty on her side. She is quite as much in love with him as ever he is with her. It's a case where the man has only got to ask to have."

"I wonder whether he has said anything yet to Jessie on the subject?"

"Well, you need not wonder long, for I can tell you that he has not."

"How do you know that, Bess?"

"Why, of course, from the girl herself. Having a women's natural curiosity, and exercising that privilege which my age gives me, I asked her if there was anything between them, and she assured me there was not."

"Well then, I'll tell you what my opinion is, wife; the chap has got something else on his mind which troubles him."

"What makes you think that?"

"Little things I have noticed from time to time; but more especially the few words dropped when he first came here, to the effect that his had been a wasted life. He said, if I remember right, that he had disgraced a good name, and now wanted to hide and escape recognition."

"Have you ever tried to gain his confidence?"

"No, Bess, for I have always felt a delicacy about it. In my opinion, the confidence that is worth the name, should be given willingly, and not forced."

"A little encouragement might not be thrown away,—natures, you know, are so different."

"Well, the very next opportunity that offers I will endeavour to draw him out."

Not many days after this conversation had taken place, Ranger was seated with Fellows, at the close of the day's labour, outside the house, smoking their pipes, which seemed to offer the opportunity the former was waiting for.

Breaking the silence which had reigned for some time, Ranger started by saying—

"Look here, Fellows, you have been here now sufficiently long to know that I am not the sort of chap that is anxious to pry into the private affairs of other people, and therefore what I am about to say is not with any desire to gratify an idle curiosity."

"That I am quite prepared to believe," he replied; "and anything you want to know, which I am able to tell, I shall be quite ready to do."

"Well then, to come to the point at once, from your manner of late I should judge you have something on your mind which is troubling you. Am I right?"

"Suppose I have! What then?"

"Why, my boy, it will relieve your mind if you feel you can tell me what is troubling you. And who knows but that I may be able to help you, as I shall be willing to do if I can."

"Your kindness touches me, but I am afraid your offer will not avail me much."

"The way to prove that will be by letting me know your difficulty."

"My difficulty, farmer, is the story of my life, which recent events have brought more prominently before me. For some time I have felt that I needed a friend,—one in whom I could confide, and who would be capable of advising me.

"Well, all I will say is, that if you feel you can do so, you may trust me; and if I am not able to help you, you will find that Ranger is not a man to betray a trust reposed in him."

"I quite believe you, my friend; and as a proof of the opinion I had formed of you, I may say I have several times of late been on the point of opening my mind to you, but something or other has occurred to prevent my doing so."

After pausing awhile, he proceeded—

"When I came over to this country, I left, away up in the north of England, a widowed mother and sister with the full conviction that I had met my death by drowning. This is how it happened: I was travelling for a well-known firm of manufacturers in the Midlands, and had been absent on the Continent for some months. I had collected a lot of money on their account, when I was tempted one evening, with a so-called friend, to visit one of the many gambling hells which abound in most Continental cities. I was persuaded to play, and under the influence of the cursed drink, and the excitement of the game,—in which I met with some success at first,—I was led to plunge recklessly; until, when at length I was induced to leave, I found that I had lost heavily, and, what was worse, it was not my own money I had lost. In returning I had formed no clear idea as to what I was to do about the money lost, until, on board the boat I was travelling by, an event occurred which in a moment shaped out my course.

[image]

*THE ALARM WAS GIVEN, AND THE ENGINES WERE AT ONCE SLOWED DOWN.*

"During the passage, which was a rough one, a man fell overboard. The alarm was given, the engines were at once slowed down, and a boat was lowered, and for an hour every effort made to recover him. It was unavailing, as the body was not found.

"I had seen the man who was lost, and had been led to notice him rather closely, from the fact of his having taken up what I regarded as a dangerous position, with such a sea as was then on, in the stern of the vessel. So that when, from the sheltered position in which I was standing on the cabin stairs, I saw him fall over, I blamed myself that I had not warned him of the danger he was in.

"Whilst the attention of all on deck were engaged with the efforts being made to recover the body, a thought occurred to me which I at once proceeded to give effect to.

"I hastened down below, sought out the bunk in which I had seen the miss-

ing man during the morning,—it was next but one to my own,—and, as I remembered he was about my own age and size, I felt little hesitation in changing my own clothes for such of his as I found there, and with the result that, by remaining silent as to what I knew, on my clothes being found where his had been, and with papers in the pockets proclaiming who they belonged to, it was reported that I had been lost; whilst nothing, so far as I was able to learn, appears to have ever been said about the real man who was drowned, so that he must have had very few friends to inquire after him.

"Having thus effaced myself, I resolved to expatriate myself for fear of being discovered, and that is how I come to be here."

"A very infamous ruse on your part," said Ranger, who had listened with attention to all that Fellows had been relating. "Have you never written to let your mother know that you were alive?"

"No; I have always felt that that would be too risky a proceeding."

"Well, since this must have been a great trouble to you, and a burden on your mind ever since you went wrong, what circumstance has given rise to your present anxiety?"

"You may well ask, since, but for what has lately arisen, I should not have sought to inflict upon you my life's sad story."

"Out with it then, man, and make an end of the matter!"

"The simple fact is, I have formed what some would consider, in my circumstances, a mad attachment to Jessie Russell."

"No need to be ashamed of that, my boy! She's as fine a girl, and as good a girl, as can be found anywhere this side of the Rockies!"

"That thought, if anything, only increases my difficulty. You see, at present she is quite ignorant as to my past; and my fear is that if I tell her what I feel she ought to know, she will be inclined to despise me, and refuse to listen to me. On the other hand, if the goodness of her heart should prompt her to overlook my past misdeeds, and to favourably consider my suit, the knowledge of my past will only serve to increase her anxiety on my account, and burden her with a load of care which silence on my part might materially lessen. I cannot make up my mind as to what to do."

Ranger refrained from giving any immediate reply, and appeared for a time to be lost in thought. After considerable reflection he said—

"I have no hesitation about the advice I am going to give. There is undoubtedly much force in what you urge, as to the advantages of concealing all that relates to your past life; but I look upon it, that the woman who is to be a man's wife ought to be one he can trust. They should both possess each other's confidence. There should, therefore, be no secrets between them. And especially to begin married life it forms a bad precedent.

"Besides, we none of us know what the future may turn up for any of us; and although what you have told me seems hidden away secure enough at present, it would be almost too much to say that no circumstance, or combination of circumstances, could ever bring the past to light. And since it would be not only very awkward, but might be the means of wrecking your happiness, if anything should cause the past to be revealed, I say, by all means risk the reception it is likely to meet with, and tell Jessie all you have told me. She has a right to know the kind of man who is asking her to marry him. She deserves to have every confidence placed in her; and, unless I am very much mistaken in her character, she is not likely to cause a man's past to be a bar to his future in the matter contemplated, if she has any regard for him."

"I am neither surprised nor disconcerted at your advice," was Fellows' rejoinder. "It is, in fact, just what I expected from you. It is counsel which is quite in accordance with my own feelings, and what my conscience tells me is the correct course to pursue. I feel strongly disposed to act upon it at once; but I will just let the matter rest where it is at present, whilst I think over what you have said."

"But there is still another bit of advice I should like to add, if I may," said Ranger.

"I think I can guess what that is,—still you may as well give it."

"Write at once home, and to your employers, a full account of all you have told me."

"Why? In order that a detective may be put upon my track?"

"That was not my idea. But if you fear such a result, then why not write your mother, and get her to call upon your firm with a statement from you, but without naming your present place of abode, and leave her to decide, after seeing them, whether it would be wise to let them know where you are?"

"I am very much obliged to you, farmer; but as what you have suggested will require very careful thought, and very delicate handling, I will let that stand over for further consideration. It has waited so long that no harm will be done by a still further delay."

"Except so far as your mother is concerned,—you do not know what state she may be in at present."

"Quite true! Yet— Well, I will think it over, and let you know in a day or two."

It was with that understanding they separated.

But their rest would have been less easy had they known that all which had passed between them that night had been overheard, and was being treasured up

for future use.

## CHAPTER XVIII.
### A SNAKE IN THE GRASS.

"... Warily
I stole into a neighbour thicket by,
And overheard what you shall overhear."
*Love's Labours Lost*, Act V. sc. ii.

Ranger's homestead had been erected on a clearing, in the midst of what at one period was a well-wooded stretch of country, thickly overgrown with the pine, balsam, maple, and other trees indigenous to the soil, interspersed with a rich undergrowth of luxuriant vegetation, the alternate growth and reproduction of ages.

The rear of this house, which all this wealth and prodigality of nature's productions extended up to, had been left untouched by the axe or saw of the invader, except where a narrow path had been cleared to admit of easy access to a patch of garden-ground beyond. Here and there a trailing creeper had been captured, until it seemed to have become part and parcel of the dwelling itself, so that at times it was not easy to decide where the house ended and the scrub or wood began.

If Ranger and his companion had been less intent upon the subject of their conversation, their attention might have been attracted by a suspicious movement, which occasionally agitated the undergrowth not far from where they were seated. It passed, however, unnoticed.

It was dark when they closed their conversation and entered into the house.

When, however, all was quiet around, the figure of a man might have been seen stealing stealthily away from amidst the thick bush which lay within a few feet of where the two men had been holding converse, and making towards a log-shanty, dimly discernible in the darkness on a piece of rising-ground beyond the circle forming the enclosure of the homestead.

It was the abode of the Bartons; and Charles, the younger of the two brothers, was the figure from the wood now to be seen entering the door.

The room was unoccupied, John having been sent on business to M'Lean Station, which would prevent his return until next day.

Procuring a light, and seating himself at a table, he seemed to be reflecting deeply. His thoughts were inspired by the conversation which had been passing between Ranger and Fellows, and to which it must be confessed he had been an attentive, because an interested, listener.

It was while passing through the bush behind the former's homestead, on his way home, at the close of work for the day, that his attention had been arrested by the mention of a name which caused him to stop, and gradually but quietly to draw as close to the speakers as he felt it would be safe to do. On discovering the nature of the conversation, he did not hesitate remaining concealed, in such a position, however, as would enable him to hear the whole of what was passing.

Charles Barton, for some time a silent admirer of Jessie Russell, had been only waiting a favourable opportunity to declare his passion.

But Jessie was not a girl who would willingly afford any young man the opportunity so desired, if she had the slightest suspicion that it was being looked for. She was no prude, yet she was not a flirt; and that, in an unsettled region where men were in abundance, whilst the women were few and far between, was saying a great deal in her favour.

She had not failed to notice that several times of late Charles was to be seen lounging in the neighbourhood of her father's shanty, and this had caused her to still more carefully seclude herself from the rough settler's gaze.

Charles was a man with big ideas, but a small soul. The god he worshipped was *self*; and anything that seemed to stand in the way of self must be made to give place by fair means or foul. Scruples he had none, where *self* was in question. He had learned this evening, for the first time, of the additional difficulty which lay in his path to Jessie Russell's affections. After long and careful reflection he made up his mind how he would endeavour to get that difficulty "entirely removed."

Having provided himself with pen and ink and paper, he sat down at the table and began to write rapidly. At the end of about an hour he had finished a letter, which lay folded, sealed, and addressed in front of him.

It bore the inscription—

**Messrs. H. & E. Quinion  Broadstone** England.

It contained a statement of the confession he had that evening heard given by Fellows, with an intimation of where he was now to be found in case the firm felt any desire to possess that information.

After hinting at sources of further information, it concluded with an urgent request that the writer's name, which was communicated in strict confidence, as a proof of *bonâ fides*, should be kept a profound secret.

How to get this letter posted without its destination becoming a topic for conversation, was the difficulty which next presented itself.

For several days he was at a loss to know how to overcome this obstacle to the success of his scheme.

On the fourth day after the events narrated, Ranger announced his intention of riding over to Wolseley Station on business which would detain him until the evening of the next day.

It was too good an opportunity to be missed; so a few hours after the farmer's departure, securing a horse from amongst the many that are allowed free range without detriment, it being only imported horses of the better class which, as a rule, are stabled, he soon had it saddled, and was off for "Indian Head," where he expected to find a post-box convenient, into which his letter might be dropped.

After a couple of hours' sharp ride, he entered the little town, where, without much difficulty, he discovered the object of his search.

Having accomplished his mission, and given his horse breathing time, he set out on his return. The moon had not yet risen, but the stars shone out in a clear sky; and objects were plainly visible on the road to be traversed.

Mounting the crest of a hill, he was proceeding at an easy trot to descend a winding pathway which led on to the plains, when something—it was never known what—caused the horse to swerve and stumble, and the next minute, before its rider could recover himself, he was pitched forward with the horse on top of him.

Recovering his feet without much difficulty, the horse stood for a few moments, and then, as if it had taken in the situation, galloped off in the direction of home.

Barton was stunned by the fall, and lay on the road insensible.

Two hours passed before the man showed signs of returning consciousness. Then the keen wind which blew across his face, as he lay extended on the ground, caused a tremor to pass through his body, and opening his eyes he endeavoured to sit up, but at first the pain which the effort inflicted was so great he lay for a time trying to collect thoughts which were confused and scattered. A second effort was attended with more success, when he proceeded to make a careful examination of his limbs, to ascertain what, if any, injury had been sustained.

Satisfied with the result that no bones had been broken, yet suffering intensely from a sprained ankle and an injured knee-joint, which he found would prevent him standing, let alone attempting to walk, he realised that however desirous he might be of making progress, there was nothing for it but to remain where he was, with what fortitude he might be able to summon to his support.

By dint of a little exertion he managed to crawl on to the bank at the side

of the track, and there, against the trunk of a large oak, he prepared to make the best of his position, in the hope that help of some kind would sooner or later turn up.

He had lain there some time—dozing between whiles—when he became conscious of sounds as of the distant grind of heavy wheels, and the slow measured tread of horses' feet. Listening intently, he soon made it out to be a waggon-team, which he judged to be from some neighbouring homestead, on its way to one of the stations,—M'Lean or Indian Head,—and, as subsequently proved to be the case, with produce to be railed on to Regina or Winnipeg. When within range of his voice, Barton had little difficulty in arresting the attention of the teamster, who, stopping his horses and dropping the reins, quickly dismounted, and, with lantern in hand made his way to the side of the track from whence the sounds proceeded.

The position of affairs was explained, when, calling his companion to help him, they together lifted the all but helpless man into as comfortable a position as it was possible to make for him in the waggon, an operation which was only accomplished with considerable difficulty, seeing that nearly every inch of space was well occupied with farm produce of a marketable kind.

Indian Head—his destination—was reached as daylight began to break, when, handing Barton over for the time being to some of the railway officials, he had just sufficient time left to get his load transferred to one of the empty trucks in waiting, before the whistle sounded and the heavily loaded train steamed out of the station on its way to Regina, distant about some forty miles farther.

Having successfully accomplished the object he had in view, the waggoner—a farmer whose homestead was but a few miles off the rail—next proceeded to question Barton as to what was to be done with him.

On learning that he was one of Ranger's men, and that Ranger could probably be found at Wolseley, having intended to stay the night there, he at once decided to send on a wire in the hope of intercepting him there and getting him to take Indian Head as his route home in order to pick up Barton.

In the course of the morning a reply came to say he would be there; and late in the afternoon Ranger drove up, not a little surprised at discovering who it was that was awaiting him, as well as the condition he was in.

Having had the injured man transferred to his own conveyance, he mounted and drove off.

On reaching home, he found an uneasy feeling had been spreading at the prolonged absence of Barton, especially when it got reported that a horse, saddled and bridled, had been found grazing, which it was believed must have been the one Barton had started out upon the evening before, and which had apparently returned riderless; but where his rider had been left, no one had any means of

telling, since it did not appear to be known in which direction he had gone.

The farmer's return with the missing man at once put an end to all doubts, and, with as little delay as possible, he was conveyed to his own shanty, where both his sprained ankle and damaged knee received the attention needed, so that he was soon able to resume his usual duties on the farm.

When Barton explained to Ranger the object of his journey, which he did as they drove home, it was one of such common occurrence that it left no impression upon his mind as to there being anything peculiar in it.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### HESITATING.

"... At this hour
Lie at my mercy all mine enemies."
*The Tempest*, Act IV. sc. i.

When, in due course, Barton's letter reached Broadstone, the astonishment and surprise it gave rise to was beyond all description. The excitement it created in the breasts of the partners was intense. Old memories were aroused with regard to incidents long since regarded as for ever buried.

The circumstances under which they were now revived seemed to possess more the character of fiction than fact. Yet the details given, and the circumstantial nature of the narration, seemed to preclude all possibility of doubt.

What ought to be the action of the firm in the matter now? This was the problem which faced them, demanding a decision,—but a decision which they found themselves unable to agree upon.

It was therefore wisely resolved to leave the matter where it was at present, and to return to the subject later on, after each had been able to think out what was the best course to pursue.

A week went by, during which the solicitors to the firm had been seen and consulted. Their advice was friendly, but cautious. Whilst from a strictly legal point of view it might be right to take steps to have the culprit arrested and prosecuted, perfectly legitimate reasons could be adduced for taking no notice of the letter and refraining from any action in the matter.

Their advice was to have inquiries made, through their agents in Ontario, as to the truth of the information forwarded, and the character of the writer of

the letter; as well as to learn, if possible, his object in writing. It was pointed out that this need not involve any very great expense, and on the information received they could then decide how to act.

They resolved to follow this advice, especially as the further delay would afford additional opportunity for reflection.

Acting upon instructions received, their solicitors wrote their agents in Quebec, by the next outward mail, giving a full account of their client's case, and requesting them to obtain, through the agency of the police—or by any other means, if considered more desirable: The character of Ranger, his holding and belongings, and his status in the country; whether anyone known as Fellows—but whose real name was Ralph Sinclair—was at present in his employ; the date when he came there; where he came from; what position he was filling; and the reputation he was held in.

The same information as to a Charles Barton; and, as this was the person sending certain information with regard to the first named, to ascertain to what extent they associated, and, if possible, the causes which had induced him to reveal what he had done about the man known as Fellows.

It was specially enjoined that the information was to be obtained with the greatest caution, as on no account must it leak out that these inquiries were being made from England.

As the matter seemed to be one possessing features of interest which might lead to important developments, the agents lost no time in seeking an interview with the chief of police; who, after a careful perusal of the letter from their correspondents, promised he would write for full information to their headquarters staff at Regina, who would no doubt be able to get what was wanted.

In the attitude taken up by the great firm of Quinion towards their former employé, there was no feeling of vindictiveness manifested. They had, in fact, never yet been known to prosecute a defaulting servant, although many opportunities had offered for so doing. Their leniency towards men who had been detected defrauding them had almost become proverbial, so that they were beginning to look upon it themselves as a matter of reproach.

The members of the firm were men of high principle, anxious not only to stand well in the public gaze, but desirous that their motives should be beyond suspicion. They were nominally religious men, but making no very pronounced profession of their opinions and beliefs. Crooked and perverse as the treatment of their London employés had been, their conduct was so surrounded with sophisms for arguments, that shadows had assumed substantial form, and they seemed to have persuaded themselves, if not others, that in all that they had done they had been guided only by the highest principles of moral rectitude, leaving nothing of which they need feel ashamed.

Burns has very aptly said—

"Oh, wad some power the giftie gie us
To see oursel's as others see us!
It wad frae monie a blunder free us
And foolish notion."

They had not lost sight of the mother of Sinclair,—or Fellows, as we must continue to call him,—since their first impulse was to acquaint her with what they had heard.

Upon reflection, they felt it would be wiser to wait until, with the fresh light which they hoped to receive as the result of the inquiries set on foot, their mind was better made up as to the course they ought to pursue.

## CHAPTER XX.

### ON THE TRAIL.

"Thou art a fellow of a good report,
Thy life hath had some snatch of honour in it."
*Julius Cæsar*, Act V. sc. v.

Regina, which, prior to the advent of the Great Trunk Line of the Canadian Pacific Railway, was possessed of but a few straggling log-shanties—the rough dwellings of settlers and squatters, the early pioneers in the great North-West of those civilising forces which are marching with so much rapidity across the face of the American Continent—is not only the principal town, but has the honour of being the capital of the province and the seat of the legislature.

Yet, rejoicing in a population of not more than some two thousand, it is making such rapid advances as bids fair to raise it, in a very little while, to a position of importance and pre-eminence.

The mounted police have here their headquarters, and it was therefore in the order of things official, as well as natural, that the inquiry set on foot at Quebec should be forwarded to this little but important centre for further elucidation.

To John Stone, or "Puffey," as the name by which he is best known, was entrusted the task of obtaining the required information.

The work, although of an eminently peaceful character, was beset with no ordinary difficulties, from the secrecy with which the information had to be obtained.

Taking Nat Langham's Store on his route, he soon found himself in the midst of a company of the roughest and lowest of the labouring-class population of the district. Smoking, drinking, gambling, and betting, were the usual order of proceedings; occasionally varied by a free fight, in which the use of knives and firearms were not unknown.

Beyond a few brief glances from carelessly turned heads—the usual greeting to a fresh-comer—but little notice was taken of his advent into their midst. Calling for a liquor, and lighting his pipe, he joined a group at one of the tables, where play was in progress, and soon became an apparently interested spectator.

Presently one of the players, turning to Stone, asked—

"What are they going to do with Red Dick, Puffey?"

"Oh, he is of too much importance to be dealt with by the authorities hereabouts."

"What! do they intend sending him up to Quebec?"

"Yes," replied Puffey; "and there he'll stand a very poor chance."

After a pause, "What do you know about him?" inquired Puffey.

"I don't know the fellow, and don't want to," was the rejoinder. "I only felt interested because I was with the force when he was caught."

"Oh, I see! you were one of the volunteer force that aided the police."

"That's so, sonny."

"What was the name of him who took command of the volunteer force? Do you remember him?"

"Yes, very well. It was a chap named Fellows, at Ranger's."

"Not been hereabouts long, has he?" inquired Puffey indifferently.

"Not above six or seven months, I believe," was the reply.

"Came from England, I think we were told?"

"Yes."

"He seemed to understand his business very well. Know much about him?"

"I only know that he is said to be on friendly terms with Ranger, and is believed to be rather sweet on one of the women on his station."

"Is that so?" added Puffey. "Then the fellow hasn't lost much time."

"Well, I can't say for certain," continued the speaker, "as I work on a neighbouring farm; but I heard one of my mates talking a while ago about him."

Puffey felt that here, at all events, was a source from whence some useful information might in all probability be gathered, but he was anxious not to appear too eager, for fear of exciting unnecessary inquiry.

Allowing the conversation to drop, he sat and watched the players until the

one he had held converse with gave signs of intending departure.

Rising from his seat, Puffey sauntered out of the store, and lounged about for a while until he saw the other come out, when, accosting him, he said—

"Look here, mate, I should like to have a word or two with you, if you can spare a few moments."

"All right, Puffey," replied the fellow; "say on."

"You were speaking of a girl on Ranger's farm that the chap Fellows was supposed to be sweet on. Now, as there is one on the same farm that I have had my eye upon for some time, you'll understand the interest I may appear to be taking in this matter. I should like to know the name of the girl referred to, if you can tell me?"

"Oh! is that how the wind blows?" laughed the other.

"Well, I don't want you to go blabbing about the matter; we've all got soft moments in our lives."

"Never fear, my boy! Jack Hart's not the chap to spoil sport."

"Call it sport if you like, but tell me who is the girl this Fellows is after?"

"Her name is Jess Russell. She is the daughter of one of Ranger's men; and they do say as fine a looking specimen of the sex as is to be found in the North-West."

"That's not the one I was thinking about. I don't know her; but beauty though she maybe, I'll back my girl to go one better."

"Poor old Puffey! Hit at last! I shouldn't have thought it of you."

"Well, it's not a case yet; so mind what I've said, that 'mum's' the word."

"Right you are! Nor is it a clear case yet with that Fellows, as it is said a chap named Barton has been noticed sneaking round after the same girl."

"Oh," was Puffey's comment; "then there's likely to be ructions there before long, if that's the case."

"Just as likely as not," was the reply. "Well, good-night, Puffey. I must be going."

"So long, old chap," was his parting salute, as Puffey mounted his horse and rode away, feeling that he had learned one thing from what he had heard, and that was the cause which had led up to Barton's letter.

The next day Puffey, pursuing his quest, ventured to ride boldly up to Ranger's homestead and inquire for Fellows by name. He was told he was at work in the fields, but on receiving directions where he was to be found, and how he might know him, he resolved to go in search of Fellows, first stating, in order to allay any fears as to his motives, that he was commissioned by his officer personally to thank him for the part he had taken in the recent raid.

After a rather extended search, he at length came across his man, out on a distant part of the prairie cutting corn.

Some astonishment was naturally manifested at the sight of a member of the mounted police inquiring for one of the workers on the farm.

There are certain people who are seldom regarded as welcome visitors. A man never hears that a policeman is inquiring for him without a feeling of uneasiness beginning to steal over him, he could not perhaps tell why, although all the time perfectly conscious that there was no need to be at all apprehensive as to his object.

With Fellows it was different, since, although he had no reason to think that his secret had been discovered, there was his own consciousness of guilt, ever present, and ready to start into activity at the first symptoms of coming danger.

Puffey—like the keen observer he was reputed to be—did not fail to note the start which Fellows gave when he heard his name inquired for.

His sunburnt countenance did not, however, betray his momentary agitation. Recovering his self-control, he advanced at once to the constable, and looking steadily in his face, in a clear voice, unmarked by the least tremor, exclaimed—

"My name is Fellows. What do you want with me?"

"You see who I am, Mr. Fellows; not always the most welcome of visitors?"

"That's true, sir, no doubt; but I have no reason to regard you as unwelcome."

"Nor will you," added Puffey, "when you learn the object of my visit."

The men who were working with Fellows had ceased their labours, and were crowding round to hear what the detective had to say.

"I am commissioned by the Major," said Puffey, "who commanded the force which recently made that successful raid, ending in the capture of Red Dick, to return you his thanks for the very valuable aid rendered him on that occasion, in the promptness with which his orders were carried out, and for the precision with which the duties you undertook were discharged. He fully recognises that the success of that enterprise was in no small measure due to the alertness and cohesion of your force, as well as to the able way in which that force was handled by you."

"Many of these men," replied Fellows, "standing round me, were present on the occasion referred to, and in their name, as well as my own, you may tell the Major that, whilst warmly thanking him for the flattering words addressed to us, we were all only too pleased to serve with so brave a force as the men he brought to lead us."

"That ends my mission with you," said Puffey. "Not a very terrifying one, you must admit."

Presently he added, as if a new idea had suddenly struck him, "Are you satisfied with your present occupation?"

"Yes; don't I look as if I was?" he asked.

"It was only a passing thought, which that moment occurred to me; you are just the sort of chap we could very well do with in our force. Would you care to join us?"

"No such idea has ever entered my head, and I don't feel as if I should much care for the life."

"Well, I've no authority to ask you, but you might think it over."

"No harm in my doing that," he replied.

"How old are you, if it is not a rude question to ask?" said the constable.

"Just turned twenty-nine."

"English, I judge?"

"Yes."

"Been long in the Colony?"

"Only about seven months."

"Any trade or profession?"

"Was a commercial in the Old Country."

"Married or single?"

"Single."

"Hope to remain so?"

"That depends on circumstances."

"You'll excuse my being so inquisitive, but I wished to make sure you were qualified for the post I just now suggested to you; and from all you tell me, I have no reason to doubt but our people would only be too pleased to accept you if you choose to apply."

"Thanks; I'll think about it."

"A question sure to be asked, and therefore one I may as well put: Any special reason for changing a commercial life for an agricultural one?"

"N—o; except that I was not getting on as well as I should have liked, and so determined to make an entire change."

Puffey noticed that this last answer was not given quite so promptly as the replies to his other questions had been, from which fact he was not slow to draw his own conclusions.

It suited his purpose to induce the belief in Fellows' mind, that the mounted police presented a good opening for the employment of his abilities; but that it was an opinion likely to find support in official quarters, should application be made for an appointment, was a matter of no moment to him whatever.

Quitting the track, by which the small towns along the line of the railway were usually reached, he started to return by a cross-cut over the open prairie with which he was familiar, in the hope that by so doing he might possibly come across farm-hands from whom something further could be learned.

He had not proceeded far, before he saw three men seated beneath the shade of a sheltering clump of trees bordering a small stream not above three to four feet deep, and therefore easily fordable. The spot selected was a small hollow, thickly covered with that short crisp variety of grass known as "buffalo grass," on which they were now resting after partaking of the usual midday meal.

Riding up to where they were seated, he saluted them with—

"Good-day, comrades! Do you remember me?"

"No fear, Puffey, after once seen."

"You were with us at the capture of Red Dick, I think?"

"Two of us were."

"Ah, I have just been over and seen Fellows, to thank him, and all who were with him, for the excellent help rendered to the police on that occasion."

"What will be done with the prisoner?"

"That will be decided at Quebec."

"Have they sent him there?"

"Yes."

"Then he has not much chance left."

"Well, we shall see."

"You say you saw Fellows?" the men inquired.

"Yes; he's a smart chap, and I have been trying to persuade him to join our force."

"What next? Is he inclined to do it?"

"I can't say yet. He has promised to think the matter over, which is all I could expect at first."

"And I hope it will end there; he's too good a pal to lose."

"Do you know much about him then? Has he been here long?"

"Not many months, but he is good company, plenty to talk about, and inclined to be sociable."

"Does he bear a good character?"

"We know nothing about him before he came here, but we have never heard a word against him since he has been amongst us."

Evidently there was nothing to be gained by pursuing this conversation, so shortly after he wished them "Good day," and rode off.

On the whole, he felt satisfied with the result of his inquiries. He had not added much that was new, but what he had heard tended to confirm that which was already known.

He would like to have scraped together a little more knowledge of Barton, but he had been afraid to inquire, there being no good opening given him to do

so.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### JESSIE RUSSELL.

"It is my lady; O, it is my love!
O, that she knew she were!"
*Romeo and Juliet*, Act II. sc. ii.

"Now, Jess, buck up, my girl! I've brought a companion home with me to-night to have a bit of supper and a smoke, so look alive."

"All right, dad! Don't make a fuss about such a trifle," was the response.

"Come along, Fellows; don't stand outside like that, man alive! Come in, and make yourself at home."

The frugal board was soon spread with the customary evening meal, which Russell and his daughter were in the habit of partaking alone, but which on the evening in question he had invited Fellows to join them in.

When this was finished, the table cleared, and the pipes lighted, the woman's fingers found full employment upon garments which needed repairing, whilst the men occupied their time in discussing the events of the day, only occasionally allowing those of the larger outer world to engage their attention, since those were matters about which they heard at very irregular intervals.

Fellows had not yet found that convenient opportunity he had given Ranger to understand he was waiting for, that he might make Jessie the confidante of his most cherished desires.

And now, with the father present, he did not feel that this was an opportune moment.

"Puffey was telling me yesterday about the proposal he had made to you of joining their force. Do you intend giving that proposal any serious consideration?"

"Well, I scarcely know," laughingly replied Fellows.

"But you don't mean to say the prospect it holds out is better than the one before you here?"

"No, I don't think it is. The only charm about it is the excitement it offers."

"There may be some attraction in that to a single man, with youth and health in front of him; but the advance is slow and uncertain, and the life some-

what precarious."

"Surely you are not thinking of leaving us so soon?" chimed in Jessie, with just a shade of eagerness in her tone.

"I can hardly say that," said Fellows thoughtfully. "But the life here is so dull and monotonous, I must have a change of some sort. I want excitement. I feel at times as if I should go mad!"

"Isn't there any of the men you can make companions of, to spend an occasional evening with?"

"Well, I am afraid not; they don't seem quite my style."

"What about the Bartons? I should have thought that one or both of those would have just been about your mark."

"I don't dislike the elder of the two men," said Fellows, "but I can't say I like the younger one."

"Now you mention him," replied Russell, "he certainly does not impress one very favourably. He never has much to say for himself, and seldom joins in our conversation."

"Women are stupid creatures, you'll say, and jump to all manner of ridiculous conclusions," said Jessie; "but for all that I must say I don't like him. There's something about the man's look and manner which makes me feel queer whenever I see him."

Fellows looked up with a smile, as he said, "I don't think women such stupid creatures; they have a sort of power, which we men do not appear to possess, called intuition, which enables them to form conclusions a great deal more rapidly than the members of the opposite sex; and, what is more to the point, their rapidly formed conclusions are less frequently wrong than are the more laboured ones which we indulge ourselves in delivering, often with a great assumption of authority, more impressive than the argument or its conclusion."

"Wisely spoken, Sir Oracle!" exclaimed Russell, as he clapped his hands together by way of indicating his approval; whilst Jessie's eyes sparkled as she listened to his defence of her sex.

"But we are getting off the track," remarked Fellows. "We were talking about what I was likely to be doing; and on that point, I will frankly confess, I have not yet made up my mind."

"Then don't be in any hurry to do that which may involve a life-long repentance," said Russell.

"Changing the subject," remarked Fellows, "what's your opinion of Barton's project?"

"What? as to going to the Yukon?"

"Yes."

"Why, I think if they are wise they'll stay where they are."

”But it appears to be a wonderful country; and has the greatest seal and salmon fisheries, with cod-banks that beat those of Newfoundland.”

”That may be all very true,” responded Russell, ”if fishing be the object in view; but a man has got to stand the climate.”

”No doubt that’s a difficulty.”

”I should rather think so, if what I read is true, that the ground in certain parts is frozen to a depth of two hundred feet.”

”The search for gold must be hard work under such conditions.”

”The rapid changes, too, must be awfully trying,” added Russell. ”Some days it is so warm that one may fairly roast, whilst the next day you would be looking for your overcoat.”

”All which goes to show that only the sound and healthy should risk the dangers which undoubtedly will have to be faced.”

”Men born in southern latitudes are said to have become insane through the long darkness which prevails.”

”Well,” said Fellows, ”although it is true that hundreds have been driven back, unable to endure the hardships of the place, whilst as many more have been starved or frozen to death, yet I should not at all mind risking my chance if I saw any way of getting there.”

”Of course, how to get out is the difficulty; the expenses are so great that a little fortune is needed to begin with.”

”Provided the necessary capital can be found, next to good health, what is most needed is a good equipment. The mounted police who have been sent there are all right, because they have been well provided by the Government with food and clothing. Women and children stand the climate; and all reliable testimony is to the effect that the climatic drawbacks are trivial to those who are well equipped.”

”It appears to me,” said Russell, ”that for the inexperienced, and those who know little or nothing of roughing it, to venture into such a region as the Yukon is known to be at its best is the extreme of folly. Under the most favourable conditions it offers so many hardships, that those who have not what the Yanks call ’grit,’ and endurance, should keep out of it.”

”I quite agree with all you say,” replied Fellows. ”Yet I think,” he added, ”that much of the mischief and hardships we hear about have been due to the mode of travelling and the routes taken.”

”Which, then, do you regard as the better way to go?”

”Certainly not through the passes over the mountains, in which so many hundreds are said to have met their deaths.”

”How then would you propose getting there?”

”By what is now known as the ’All-Water-Route,’ up the Yukon River to

Dawson City."

"But isn't that a long and tedious way, which, if commenced when navigation opens, is completed so near the end of the season that you have practically no time left for operations that year?"

"I think that was so," said Fellows, "when the rush first began, but the conditions have now been rendered far more favourable."

"Is that so?" asked Russell.

"The agents say that through the passes it takes from forty to seventy days to get from San Francisco to Dawson City; but by the 'All-Water-Route,' although you have to start later from the same port, the time taken need never exceed about four weeks; so that with more comfort and convenience, at the cost of less time, you really reach Dawson City sooner than by means of what may be termed the overland route."

"Well, when I've got a couple of hundred pounds to spare I may think more seriously about the desirability of running the risk, but at present I have not the means, and therefore, however great the facilities, it's no use my thinking much about it."

"That would be my difficulty likewise," said Fellows; "and it is one, too, which it will take the Bartons some time to overcome, I'm thinking."

"My opinion," said Jessie, "is, that if the majority of men who are never satisfied with what they have, but who are ever ready to run after the latest craze, would develop the same amount of energy in trying to improve their position amid existing circumstances as they do when they find themselves in the midst of fresh scenes, with new surroundings, there would be less dissatisfaction and more success in life at home than is usually considered possible."

"Quite true, Miss Russell," replied Fellows; "and I suppose it must be put down as a man's weakness."

"Still, if a weakness, not one that is, or should be regarded as, wholly incurable."

"Yet 'What will Mrs. Grundy say?' is an influence quite as strong in operating upon men as upon women."

"What a misfortune! It seems a sad admission to have to make."

"It is, however, unfortunately too true, since the opinions which others form of us enter very largely into the rule of conduct regulating our daily life. It is seldom until old age begins to overtake us, that men assume that independence of the world's frowns and sneers which alone enables them to act and speak upon sound principles, regardless of consequences."

The time had passed so pleasantly and rapidly that they were not a little surprised to find it was long past the usual hour for retiring.

After a hasty "Good-night," Fellows went home, well pleased with what he

had seen and heard, and more than ever determined to make an opportunity, at no distant date, for a confidential talk with Jessie Russell.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### "DEAD, BUT IS ALIVE AGAIN."

"Alive again? then show me where he is."
*Henry VI.*, Part II. Act III. sc. iii.

Mrs. Sinclair had been slowly, yet gradually, recovering from the long illness which had followed upon the news of her son's death, and the terrible revelations with respect to his conduct preceding.

The habits of her small household had of late been considerably disarranged, so that since her illness she had become accustomed to having her morning meal served in her bedroom. As the season advanced, her indisposition to struggle against the growing love for this indulgence became more marked, until it had almost become a recognised habit which it would have been difficult to overcome.

Autumn tints had already begun to tinge with their brilliant hues the lovely summer foliage, which the rough winds were rapidly stripping from twigs and branches, exposing them to all the effects of dews and damps, the chills and frosts of northern skies.

It was a chill October morning, and the sun had not yet attained sufficient power to dispel the mist which hung over the face of nature, as the result of the heavy dew which had fallen.

Jennie, after visiting her mother as usual, had descended to see that her breakfast was sent upstairs at the accustomed hour. A letter addressed to her mother was lying on the table in the hall, which she was surprised to find bore the Canadian postmark. The handwriting did not suggest the writer, so, curbing her curiosity, and carrying it with her, she placed it upon the tray which the maid was already waiting to take up to Mrs. Sinclair's room.

Ten minutes had scarcely elapsed when her mother's bell was rung so violently that Jennie determined to answer it herself.

On entering her bedroom she saw that her mother had fainted.

The breakfast had not been touched, but tightly grasped in her clenched hands was an open letter—the one which had that morning been received.

By the application of a few simple restoratives, with which her daughter seemed perfectly familiar, consciousness soon began to return.

As she opened her eyes, what was Jennie's astonishment to hear her exclaim, "My boy! my boy! Where is Ralph?"

The letter which had been held so tenaciously now lay upon the bed, as it had fallen from her nerveless hand. Picking it hastily up, the daughter looked to see who it was from, and with a surprise which was almost overwhelming, saw the well-known signature of her brother Ralph at the end.

A flood of tears relieved the elder woman, in the midst of which she exclaimed, "Read it, Jennie!—The letter!"

In a state of excitement almost beyond description she proceeded to do so. It was a long letter, and took her some time to get through. It was indeed from her brother—the brother they had long mourned as dead, but who, it appeared, was alive and well in a distant land.

Acting upon the advice which Ranger had given him, he had written a full confession of his conduct, omitting nothing, and not attempting to excuse himself in the least degree, nor to say anything which would tend to palliate the acts of which he had been guilty. He did not fail to express how keen and bitter was the regret he felt at the sorrow he had caused the fond mother whose love for her boy he was deeply sensible of, and could never by any possibility hope to repay. He was unwilling to return home and take the consequence of his acts, not so much because he dreaded the punishment, as that he was fearful of the additional suffering it would entail upon those he still so much loved. He therefore concluded by requesting his mother to see his late employers, let them see all he had written, but to conceal from them the place where he was living.

By the time Jennie had finished reading the contents of the letter, both women had obtained sufficient control over their emotions as to be able to hold converse together.

"My poor deluded boy!" was one of the many exclamations of a similar character with which the mother continually sought to relieve her overburdened mind.

"Poor boy! what he must have suffered! Now mind, Jennie! not a word of this to anyone, but ascertain at once the time of the trains to Broadstone, that I may arrange the most convenient one to travel by; and I must get you to go with me."

"But I think, mother, it would be better to wait a day or two until you have got over the shock the letter has given you, or you will not be in a fit condition to see the people at Broadstone."

"Well, see how the trains serve first, and after I am up I shall be better able to talk about when we may start."

Having rung for the maid, and instructed her to send for a time-table, she proceeded to assist her mother to dress.

* * * * *

The next morning, soon after seven o'clock, Mrs. Sinclair and her daughter started by an early train, due at Broadstone—a station on the main line—shortly before eight o'clock in the evening, which was duly reached, after a fatiguing journey, only some half-hour late.

A telegram, despatched at starting, had secured them apartments at the railway hotel; to these, on their arrival, they at once retired, and, after partaking of an early supper, sought that rest they each so much stood in need of.

The wind, which had been blowing in fitful gusts throughout the journey, grew in intensity as the day wore to its close, and as the night advanced it increased to the force of a hurricane. The poorer class of inhabitants trembled for the security of their little dwellings, not usually constructed in the most substantial manner. And as it swept round corners, or drove through old chimney-stacks, dislodging insecure pots on its way, the whistle became a roar as it rushed down the chimneys, or beat with fury against window-panes, which every now and then seemed on the point of yielding to the vehemence of the gale; many were the would-be sleepers whose nerves were kept on the rack, unable to rest amid the strife of elements which prevailed.

As the morning dawned the wind dropped, and rain fell in torrents.

The two ladies, in their strange apartments, with such a raging storm outside, passed a very restless and almost sleepless night, so that they felt but little refreshed when the time for rising arrived.

Breakfast over, and as the rain continued to descend in torrents without any apparent indications of its early cessation, although the distance to be traversed was trivial, they ordered a cab to be at the door by eleven o'clock, in which they duly made their appearance at the offices of the factory in Broadstone.

Finding the partners were to be seen, they sent up their cards, and, instructing the cabman to wait, were ushered into the private office of the firm, where the two gentlemen were seated.

After greeting them with that warmth and friendliness which is a marked feature in the character of the natives of the Midlands, and which also, from the long-standing friendship existing, might naturally have been anticipated, they sought to know the nature of the special business to which they felt so unexpected a visit was due.

Speaking with much emotion, and not without a strong effort to control her feelings, Mrs. Sinclair, whose pallid features bore vivid traces of unmistakable

suffering, said—

"I yesterday received a letter which, when I show you, will, I expect, be as much a surprise to you as it was to myself and daughter."

Pausing for a few moments, as she searched in her pocket for the letter referred to, she added, as soon as the important document was brought to light, "If you will kindly read this, it will fully explain the object of my visit much better than I should be able to do."

Taking the letter which was offered them, they sought and obtained permission to retire into an inner room, where it might be perused without fear of interruption.

On their return, after the lapse of some ten minutes, the younger of the two men remarked;—

"No doubt, Mrs. Sinclair, you were greatly surprised at the news which this letter brought?"

"So much so, sir, that I fainted; and it was some time before I was fully able to recover myself."

"I can well believe it. But you will, no doubt, be still more astonished when I tell you that we are already in full possession of all which that letter reveals, and a little more."

[image]

*"WE ARE ALREADY IN FULL POSSESSION OF ALL WHICH THAT LETTER REVEALS."*

"You certainly do surprise me, sir, since I cannot see how you could have obtained the information, which my son alone was in possession of, since he begs in that letter that it may be communicated privately and confidentially to you."

"As a proof, we can tell you his address when he wrote was at Ranger's Ranch, M'Lean Station, Assiniboia, North-West Canada."

"You will have noticed the address at the top of his letter has been cut away; this I did at his request, that you might not at present be informed as to where he is to be found."

"Yes; and we could not help smiling as we observed what had been done."

"But," said Mrs. Sinclair, much agitated, "may I ask how you obtained your information?"

"Certainly," replied Mr. Quinion. "It is now six or seven weeks ago since we received a letter from a person in Canada, who, although giving us his name, has requested that it may not be made known, conveying just such information

as the letter you now bring contains."

"Then it would be useless to ask you for the name of your informant?" said Mrs. Sinclair.

"Well, without the writer's permission it would scarcely be honourable on our part to do so."

"Does he state how he came by the knowledge of what he writes you?" inquired the mother.

"Yes; he states that it was a confession he overheard your son make, but to whom, or under what circumstances, is not mentioned."

"Does he give any reason for writing to you as he has done?"

"All he says on that point is, that he thought it right to do so, in case we should like to know."

"It cannot be regarded as a friendly act," Mrs. Sinclair, after some hesitation, found herself able to say.

"No; that is how we regarded it," said Mr. Quinion quietly.

"May I ask," inquired the mother, with some anxiety, "if you have taken any action in the matter?"

"Well, this is what we have done: through our solicitors here, we instructed agents in Canada to inquire fully into the truth of all the letter contains; to ascertain, beyond a doubt, whether the person referred to is the one in whom we have any interest; the character of the person who has written to us, and the motives which would probably cause him to act as he has done. We are expecting by every mail to receive this agent's report, as by it we propose being guided in the course we ought to adopt."

"Oh, my dear friends! I do hope," said Mrs. Sinclair in anguished tones, "you will not think of having my poor boy prosecuted?"

"That is a matter, Mrs. Sinclair, on which we have arrived at no decision at present," was Mr. Quinion's reply.

"Oh, but is it not possible to let matters remain as they are, without reference to the report you speak of?"

"We do not say that we shall take any action upon it; at the same time, as men of business, as well as in consideration of what is due to society, we shall wait at least this report we are expecting."

"But can't you, gentlemen, for the sake of the long and honourable career of his father, as well as for my sake, and that of my daughter, give up all idea of having him arrested? It would be the death of me, I know; and I feel sure you have no wish to see that take place."

"In that you only do us justice, Mrs. Sinclair; and if it be at all possible, you may rely upon our sparing your feelings, as we have no vindictive aims to gratify."

"If it is the amount my misguided boy has robbed you of which is the difficulty, and its payment will prevent the prospect of harm coming to him, I will willingly realise everything I possess, even if it beggars me, in order that my son may be saved!"

"Don't for a moment think of it, my dear madam; for under no circumstances should we accept the payment you speak of, as that would be to compound a felony. We either prosecute or pardon."

"Oh, let me, let me prevail upon you to decide now, at once!" reiterated Mrs. Sinclair.

"Pray do not say anything more, Mrs. Sinclair, but leave the matter where it is; and trust us, that in whatever we decide we shall endeavour to do that which is right and best for all parties."

It being clear that nothing further was to be gained at present, the ladies rose and took their leave, after receiving an assurance that on the arrival of the report for which they were waiting, they would, without loss of time, let them know their decision.

Returning to their hotel, they ordered luncheon, and announced their intention of departing by the afternoon train, which would enable them to arrive home by breakfast-time the next morning.

On reaching home, the mother's first concern was to ascertain the date of the next Canadian mail out, which she learned was two days hence.

Her next act was to write a very long and loving letter to her boy, giving a full account of her visit to Broadstone and its result. And whilst it was full of sorrow and regret for the past, there was not a word of upbraiding, but expressions of gratitude and joy for the welcome news which had practically given back to her a son previously mourned as dead.

In addition to stating the surprise she experienced on learning that his late employers were in full possession of the information she had come to impart, she could not refrain from adding, that as there was still doubt as to what their intentions might be, on receiving the report for which they were waiting, she must urge him to think very seriously of the desirability of getting clear away from his present station before it might be too late to do so.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE STORY EVER NEW.

"Let her speak of me before her father."—*Othello*, Act I. sc. iii.

"Good afternoon, Miss Russell," was the greeting which Jessie received one Sunday afternoon, as, on rounding a bend of the hill, on the other side of which was Ranger's homestead, she was suddenly brought face to face with Fellows, who was rapidly advancing along the track which led to her father's log dwelling.

The air was laden with the refreshing, invigorating scent of the pines from the wood towards which she was wending, but the rapidly falling leaves, and the changing hues of autumn, were everywhere giving indications that summer was nearly over, and that Mother Nature would soon be arrayed in more sober attire, befitting the wintry season of chill and gloom.

Jessie was accustomed to ramble on a Sunday afternoon, when the midday meal had been despatched, whilst her father indulged himself with his pipe, or sat and dozed in a chair at the door of his little shanty, which overlooked the small patch of garden in front.

"I was on my way to call upon you," added Fellows, "so that I am very glad to have met you."

"Father is all alone at home," said Jessie, as the colour mounted to her cheeks.

"If my company is not likely to prove irksome," he added, "I should much prefer a walk with you."

"Rather an unusual request," added Jess, "but I suppose I ought not to object."

After proceeding in silence for some moments, Fellows said, "I have been wanting to have a quiet talk with you, Miss Russell, for some time, and now the opportunity presents itself I scarcely know how to begin."

Jessie, whose face had suddenly become the colour of scarlet, could find no words with which to help him; therefore, after a brief pause, he proceeded to tell her of the feelings he entertained towards her, and the hope he cherished that she might be disposed to give his suit a little favourable consideration.

Whatever writers of romance may say to the contrary, out of an extreme desire to invest their heroines with qualities and attributes which, as a rule, ordinary mortals do not possess, it is seldom that a declaration such as Jessie heard this afternoon can be truthfully said to be altogether unexpected. Words may never pass to convey the intelligence, nevertheless there is a subtle magnetism in the language of the eye which telegraphs to the loved one, more vividly and more surely than words could express, the feelings with which each regards the other. So that generally, long before the declaration is made which is supposed to reveal the feelings with which the man regards the woman, she has discovered it all, and been waiting, expecting the inevitable to happen.

Except during his long illness, when Jessie had carefully and faithfully nursed him back to convalescence,—an illness, be it remembered, which had been

brought about by his self-denying efforts on her behalf, in rescuing her from a position of considerable danger,—she had had but few opportunities of seeing him, or being thrown into his society. Few and brief, however, as many of those interviews had proved, they had not been without leaving their effects behind. The eyes as they had looked into each other's faces, or caught stolen glances which were thought to be unobserved, had given rise to thoughts and feelings too subtle for words to express, and too sacred even for themselves to admit, during that process of introspection which from time to time went on.

Jessie, therefore, whilst perfectly conscious in her own heart that the young fellow now by her side was entertaining feelings for her which might eventually find expression in words, was quite unprepared for the meeting this afternoon, and for what was in truth the sudden declaration of his affection for her.

Jessie, it may be added, was a woman possessing a fair amount of common-sense, yet of an ardent and enthusiastic temperament,—capable of loving intensely an object worthy of her affections.

The period which had elapsed since attaining womanhood had been so brief, that she was not yet quit of many of the high ideals and romantic notions with which lovers are wont to invest the heroes or heroines they are in search of; but her rough prairie-training, added to the common-sense shrewdness of her character, had enabled her to see that marriage ought not to be regarded as such a thing of chance as to be left dependent upon the fancied love, growing out of the attractions of a pretty form or a lovely face, calculated as they are to bewitch and bewilder the first enamoured noodle that casts his glances upon them.

It was, therefore, in tones of some hesitation that she expressed the opinion that they had scarcely known each other long enough, or seen sufficient of one another, to be able to judge as to their suitability for such an important arrangement.

"I was fully prepared for something like that, Jessie—if I may call you that?" said Fellows.

"Well then, don't you think it would be better for me to defer any answer at present?" she naïvely asked.

"I don't think so, my dear—and yet——" After some hesitation he added, "How can I venture to tell you all that is on my mind? and yet I feel it would not be fair on my part to win, perhaps, your consent to my suit, without first placing you in full possession of the facts in my past life, which may seriously affect your decision."

"But if the opinion I have been led to form of you be a correct one, it cannot be anything of which you need be ashamed or afraid to tell me."

"Ah, Jessie!" he exclaimed in mournful tones, "I am afraid you have estimated me too highly."

"Tell me, then," she added somewhat eagerly, her moistening eyes betraying only too plainly the anxiety she felt, yet was loath to reveal.

Thus encouraged, Fellows at once confided to her the story of his past life, which was much to the same effect as had been narrated to Ranger, and overheard by Barton, from the place where he lay concealed.

In addition to what he had revealed to Ranger, he was now able to add, that, acting upon the advice then given, he had since written home to inform his mother that he was still alive, and how he had instructed her to act.

It would be difficult to describe the feeling paramount in Jessie's breast, on hearing the singular and startling confession which Fellows had made.

She felt quite unequal to the task of analysing the causes which gave rise to the emotions agitating her. They were of too conflicting a character to warrant a prompt decision on the important question which had been urged upon her.

Like the true woman that she was, there was a thrill of ecstatic pleasure running through every nerve when she fully realised that she was the possessor of a man's true love, and that man one upon whom she had been only too disposed to allow her affections to gather strength and to centre.

Her first impulse inclined her to utter a responsive "Yes" to the impassioned appeal which was addressed to her. The revulsion, however, which followed the second revelation, was one more of sorrow and regret, which left her in a state of mind she was not able to explain to her own satisfaction, nor one which qualified her to give an answer to Fellows.

"Well, Jessie," said Fellows, after waiting some time, "what interpretation am I to put upon your silence?"

"Oh, Mr. Fellows, I wish you would not press me now for a reply!"

"If that is your wish, it shall be my law, and I will wait," he replied.

"You may suppose, from my hesitation, that the avowal you have made is not one of which I entirely disapprove. It is a manly confession, to which any free woman is always proud to listen, even when it may not meet with acceptance. But what you have added is of such a nature, and of so much importance, that I feel it would be only right, before coming to any decision, to hear what father has to say about it, and what he would advise me to do."

"Perhaps you are right, my lass; in fact, I know you are. Therefore by all means consult your father and be guided by him. But don't forget me at the same time, and that on your answer will depend my future as well as my stay here."

With a very warm and sympathetic hand-clasp, which the lovers (if they may be so termed) felt it would at present be unwise to exceed, they separated, after arranging to meet on the next Sunday, under similar circumstances, should nothing transpire to put a stop to such an arrangement.

It was with mixed feelings of elation and anxiety that Fellows returned to

the Ranch.

There was much satisfaction at the thought that he was, without doubt, the possessor of the love of a true woman, for notwithstanding the cautious nature of her reply, it was sufficiently obvious the regard she entertained for him. At the same time there was cause for anxiety to a man in his position as to the advice her father might offer, and which he felt, whatever it might be, she would be strongly disposed to act upon.

But a week must elapse before he could be put in possession of her decision. No doubt an embarrassing, but not a novel one, and therefore one which he must be prepared to endure.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### "TWICE BLESSED."

"A maiden never bold;
Of spirit so still and quiet, that her motion
Blush'd at herself."—*Othello*, Act I. sc. iii.

Four days after his interview and confession to Jessie, Fellows received the letter his mother had written on her return from Broadstone, acquainting him with all the circumstances attending that interview, and of her surprise at learning that they were already in possession of all the facts connected with his escape, as well as the knowledge of where he was at present to be found.

Who could have been the writer of the letter sent to the firm he was entirely at a loss to conjecture. The facts of his life had been revealed to no one but Ranger until Sunday last, when he had taken Jessie into his confidence.

He could not bring himself to believe in the possibility of Ranger having betrayed the trust he had been led to repose in him. He would see Ranger at once and hear what light he could throw upon what seemed so mysterious.

On acquainting him with the intelligence received from home, he expressed astonishment in no measured language, for he did not fail to perceive the suspicion which would naturally arise in Fellows' mind, that, in some way or other, it was due to him the information had leaked out, so as to enable it to be conveyed to Broadstone.

It was hardly necessary for him to assure Fellows that no word had been breathed to a soul of what had been told him. The man honestly believed him.

There was, however, still the fact to be explained—how had it become known?

The only possible solution seemed to be that someone must have overheard their conversation, but who that someone could be they were unable to form any conception.

Another circumstance stated in Mrs. Sinclair's letter, calculated to give rise to uneasiness, was that an agent in Quebec had been instructed to make inquiry concerning the facts which the writer of the letter had professed to reveal. Through what channels was that inquiry likely to be made? Someone would probably be deputed to do this on the spot.

It at once occurred to Fellows that "Puffey's" recent visit was associated with that quest.

It explained, too, the man's apparent anxiety that he should become a candidate for admission to the ranks of the police, as without some such plausible excuse he could not have questioned him in the way he did.

On that assumption, his past career was already known to the police. And whatever the decision of the firm might ultimately be, he would in all probability be shadowed by them until it was made known.

They would not yet be able to prevent him leaving the country, if he was so disposed; but his progress from place to place would no doubt be noted, so that, in the event of being eventually wanted, they would know where they could place their hands upon him. How to act, or what to do under the circumstances, he felt at some loss to decide.

Sunday was again close at hand, when he had arranged to meet Jessie, in order to learn her decision, which was to determine his future.

He would await that interview, and at the same time acquaint her with this new factor, so suddenly and unexpectedly imported into his life.

Meanwhile, how had it fared with Charles Barton since the day he had written and posted the letter which had set in motion the causes that had given rise to all this uneasy feeling?

He could not account for having received no reply to the letter he had sent. That it would have been acknowledged was the least he expected. That this had not been done was at once a surprise, and a cause of anxiety as to what it might ultimately lead to, which laid a considerable tax upon his nervous powers, never remarkable for their strength.

In his associations with the men on the farm, his disposition and manners had always presented a marked contrast to those which his elder brother displayed. Whilst James was genial, candid, open, and free, ready at conversation, and willing to join the rest of the men in any little arrangement for the general good, or an evening's amusement, Charles was gloomy, taciturn, and close. He held himself aloof from the rest, as though he thought himself a superior, and

was never known to take part in any amusement such as was occasionally indulged in. And it had not failed to be noted, and commented upon, that of late these habits had become even more marked than they were at the first.

His brother would frequently rally him, when they were alone together, as to the cause of his misanthropical behaviour, without effect; nor, however lively he might be himself, nor whatever humour he was able to impart to the topics of conversation introduced, it was rare that he succeeded in creating anything beyond the ghost of a smile, or drawing out more than some monosyllabic reply.

James, with that easy, good-natured disposition which was characteristic of the man, attributed much of this to his habits as a boy, which manhood had only served to develop; to the death of their father, the break-up of the home, and the disappointment which, up to the present, had attended all the glowing visions they had formed of the fortune to be won in the Land of Gold.

Charles had kept as observant an eye as it was possible to do, without exciting unnecessary attention, on the movements of Jessie Russell, but had been unable to discover anything to cause him further uneasiness with regard to the apparent progress of Fellows' suit.

He had been hoping, too, that the result of his letter to England might be to cause the removal of his rival altogether from the present scene of his influence; and this had induced him to refrain from seeking that interview with Jessie which he was so anxious to bring about, until, as he regarded it, the coast was clear for the unimpeded prosecution of his designs.

In the event of that reply being much longer delayed, and no action apparent, he felt that it would not be wise to delay his intended interview indefinitely.

Happening one evening to be in the neighbourhood of her dwelling, he decided to extend his ramble, on the chance that he might meet with her. She was seated on a bench at the door, busily plying her needle, mending a jacket belonging to her father. "Good evening, Miss Russell," he exclaimed a little nervously, as he advanced with some trepidation to where she was seated. "Is your father at home?"

"He has not returned from the field yet," she replied. "Do you want to see him?"

"No—that is—not particularly," he replied, with a confused look. Then suddenly, as if recollecting himself, he added, "I have been thinking, my dear Miss Russell, how much happier I should be with a good wife to look after me, and care for all my wants; and I have seen no woman I should so much like to make my wife as—you! And what I want to ask is, whether you are willing to accept me for a husband? I am a plain man, with very little polish on me, and know very little of the arts by which a girl's love is usually won; but if you will consent to be my wife, I think I can promise to make you a good husband, and I don't think

you will ever have any cause to regret it."

Rough and ill-considered as such a proposal may seem to have been, when presented in so plain and unadorned a manner, it was given utterance to in a speech longer than ever he had been known to indulge in, and there was an apparent ring of honesty and truthfulness about it which, notwithstanding all its deficiencies, struck Jessie as being real. Therefore, although her feeling for the man was one of repulsion, which somehow she was unable to overcome, she repressed the strong impulse which at first manifested itself, to laugh at him, and ridicule the idea, by quietly, but firmly, replying that under no circumstances could she be induced to entertain the idea for a moment.

"May I ask why?" stammered out Charles.

"Well," she replied, "I have no present desire to get married."

"Don't you like me well enough?" he asked.

"Not well enough to marry you," was her prompt and candid reply.

"Perhaps you like someone better?" he added.

"And if I did, would there be anything very surprising in that?" she replied.

"No," he managed to get out after a pause; adding, "especially if it is the one I imagine it is."

"I don't see what right you have to imagine anything at all about it," was Jessie's spirited reply.

"The right is that which belongs to every man or woman to warn another of a danger."

"I don't understand you, sir."

"If you are thinking of the man I suppose you are——"

"Sir!" she exclaimed with some vehemence, interrupting him, "your language is insulting, and if my father were here you would not dare address me in the manner you are doing."

"At the risk of what you may think of it, I will still say," he went on, "that the man I refer to is a worthless, dishonest scoundrel, not fit to be the companion of any honest woman."

"I know nothing about the person, nor who it is you are referring to, nor do I wish to know; but this you may as well know, that I am quite capable of defending my own honour as to the company I may be disposed to keep, and any defence I may require beyond that my father is able and ready to afford me. Good evening, sir!" saying which, she rose, entered the house, and, closing the door, left Barton much chagrined at the reception he had received, and the complete failure of his fondly cherished scheme.

* * * * *

As soon as dinner was over at the homestead, Sunday saw Fellows eagerly wending his way to the place at which he had appointed to meet Jessie a week ago.

It was late in September,—harvesting was over generally through the entire length of the great North-West,—but the glory of the summer had not yet departed. The air was dry and invigorating, and not without its effect upon Fellows, which, coupled with the object he had in view, imparted a buoyancy to his spirits he had for days past been a stranger to, and gave an elasticity to his step which enabled him to accomplish his short journey in a much briefer space of time than he had reckoned upon.

He was first at the trysting-place, but he had not been long in waiting when he saw Jessie coming down the trail, a picture of sunny beauty, which the eye of the beholder could rest upon without any feeling of weariness.

Advancing at once to meet her, and noting with satisfaction the good-tempered and winsome smile pervading her rosy cheeks, he augured a favourable response to his suit.

Unable to restrain his impatience, he seized both her hands, exclaiming, "Dearest Jessie! am I right in concluding from your manner towards me, that you do not bring an unfavourable reply?"

"You are presuming, I think, sir," she answered, half averting her head, and shaking her shoulders as she did so.

"Don't say that, dear," he replied.

"What would you have me say then?" she retorted, with an arch twinkle in her eye.

"Say?" he exclaimed eagerly; "why, say that you will be mine, and make me the happiest man existing!"

"Heigh-ho! well, if wilful man must have his own way, I suppose I had better repeat my lesson according to your dictation."

"Oh, you dear, delightful treasure of a woman!" he murmured, as he folded her unresisting form in his strong arms, and kissed her passionately.

After a few moments spent in silent contemplation—moments too sacred for words—Fellows said, "And you do this, Jessie, knowing full well all I am and have been?"

"Yes, Ralph," she replied, looking him fully in the face, with an expression of calm trustfulness and confidence beaming in her large grey eyes.

"Did you tell your father—all?" he asked.

"That you may rest assured I did," was her reply.

"What did he say when he heard of my disgraceful conduct?"

"Naturally he was very sorry to hear it; at the same time he said he thought that a man's past ought not to be regarded as a perpetual barrier to his future upward progress."

”Your father is a kind-hearted man, and I esteem him for his charitable views.”

”That’s what poor dear mother used to say,” she replied.

”Then he had no objection to urge against me?”

”None!” she added; ”he gave me his full consent to do whatever my own heart dictated as right.”

”God bless you, Jessie! The aim of my life shall be that you may never have a moment’s pang of regret for the choice you have this day made.”

”Had I feared that, I would never have given you the answer I have,” was her confident reply.

Much of the conversation which followed was of that tender and confidential nature, so manifestly not intended for the too inquisitive public ear, that we refrain from repeating it, leaving it to the imagination of the more experienced to supply many of the missing links.

Before separating, he told her of the letter received from home, which had given him so great a surprise, and how much he was at a loss to conceive who could have been the spy and informer.

”Oh!” exclaimed Jessie, as she gave a start.

”What is the matter, dear?” exclaimed Fellows.

”Only a thought that flashed across my mind at what you were saying.”

”Tell me, dearest, what it is?”

”It is a matter of such trivial importance, and one which I regarded as so personal to myself, that I should not have said anything about it but for the fact you have just mentioned.”

”You need not hesitate, Jessie, to tell me anything, as whatever concerns you will not be regarded as trivial by me.”

”Well then,” she replied, with downcast eyes, ”I had a visit this week from Mr. Barton; and I suppose you’ll never guess the object of that visit?”

”Which one?” he inquired.

”Charles,” she replied.

”Then I’ll not try guessing, dear, since it is so difficult, but leave you to tell me.”

”Well then, without repeating all he said, as no doubt I should fail to do him justice, he told me very bluntly that he wanted a wife, and asked me to consent to have him for a husband. Of course, as you may well imagine, I declined that honour. He did not take my reply kindly, at which I was not altogether surprised, as I suppose no man, if he is in earnest (and I have no reason to doubt but that he was), would be likely to do. But after questioning and cross-examining me as to who I was preferring before him, he concluded that he thought he knew who the person was. It was then he said——”

Jessie paused, evidently reluctant to proceed.

"What did he say?" inquired Fellows eagerly.

"I don't feel as if I can tell you," she replied.

"Don't hesitate, dear," he said encouragingly.

"He never mentioned your name, but I felt all the time he was referring to you."

"Never mind, darling, you have gone too far now not to tell me all."

"Well, he said the man he referred to was a worthless, dishonest scoundrel, not fit to be the companion of any honest woman."

"And you had sufficient confidence in me not to be influenced by that statement?"

"Can you doubt it," she replied, "after what has passed to-day?"

"Not for one moment, dearest," he hastened to reply.

"You will easily see my reason for not intending to tell you this."

"I do, Jessie; and honour you, my love, all the more for your consideration."

"But the thought that flashed into my mind, when you told me of how your secret had somehow got known, was, could Barton in any way have become the possessor of that information, and in a fit of jealousy written the letter to England?"

"Such a thing may have been possible, but I scarcely like to regard it as probable," was Fellows' candid rejoinder.

Presently he added, "But say nothing about this to anyone, Jessie, at present, as it is a circumstance which will bear thinking about, and I will turn it over in my mind and see what is to be made out of it."

And with this understanding they parted.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE BROADSTONE DECISION.

"Let's make the best of it."—*Coriolanus*, Act V. sc. v.

Nearly two months had elapsed since the date when the agents in Quebec were instructed to make certain inquiries on behalf of Messrs. Quinion of Broadstone, when one morning, according to appointment, their solicitors called and were shown into the private offices of the firm.

The solicitors were present, in the person of a dapper little bald-headed

man of about fifty, wearing coloured glasses which concealed a pair of restless grey eyes, that allowed nothing to escape their observation.

Laying his hat upon a chair, he took from a small valise he was carrying a bulky-looking document tied with the inevitable piece of red tape, which he declared was the report of their agent, come to hand the day preceding. After carefully untying and spreading the folio sheets in front of him, he, at the bidding of the two partners, who were seated at the table facing him, commenced to read their contents.

Divested of the legal phraseology in which they were cast, and omitting the redundancy of expression so dear to the man of law, yet so bewildering to the average man of common-sense, the purport of what he read was to the effect—

That the inquiry having been intrusted to the local police, they had placed the matter in the hands of one of the most trusted and skilful members of the force, who, from inquiries made on the spot, and information received through a variety of sources, was now fully able to confirm the statements made in the letter received from their correspondent.

The motive prompting that letter, so far as the agent had been able to learn, was one of jealousy, the two men, Barton, and Fellows otherwise Sinclair, appearing to be rivals for the possession of a certain young woman employed on the same farm. And it was conjectured that Barton hoped, through the law being set in motion, to accomplish the arrest of Fellows, so that by his removal from Canada and the scene of his present influence the other might be left in unimpeded possession of the ground, to be able to press his suit with the greater probability of success.

"That, gentlemen, is our report; and it shows, I think," said the lawyer, "that we have done our best to get all the information for you that was possible."

"Quite so," nervously responded the elder of the two men, who never spoke without conveying the impression that, whilst desirous of making his presence felt, he was terribly apprehensive lest he should say anything which might be construed in a sense other than was intended.

"But," added Mr. E. Quinion in a rough, hard, and curt tone, "beyond generally confirming what the letter told us, it adds very little to our knowledge."

"No," replied the elder of the two men. "Perhaps not, perhaps not. It at least gives a motive for that letter."

"Which, after all," said the other, "is not of so much importance to us."

"Well, that I am not so sure about; the motive is, or seems to be so to me, a most unworthy one, which, if possible, we should do our utmost to discourage."

"Suppose we drop this consideration for the present," said the younger man, "and consider what are perhaps the more important features of the case. Sinclair, in the first place, betrays the trust we had reposed in him, through the influence

of the company he got into,—spends money which he had no right to, and so defrauds the firm of a very large sum. Being unable, and afraid, to face the consequences, he bolts, but succeeds in covering his escape by a ruse, which enabled him to take advantage of an accident occurring in the nick of time, of which he was prompt to avail himself. He deserves very little consideration from us, I think."

"All you say is quite true," was the other's reply, "but I don't want to forget the fact that his father for years held a very responsible and honourable position in this firm, and died respected by all who knew him."

"You think, then, that his good deeds should be capable of hiding a multitude of his son's sins," was the smiling comment of the younger man.

Taking no apparent notice of the remark, the other continued, "Then there is his mother,—a lady for whom I have the very highest esteem,—who has always been regarded as a friend, and is at present in a rather delicate state of health. I feel much sympathy for her, and would be disposed to strain a good many points before venturing to do anything which would add to her grief."

"Yes, I feel that as much as you do," replied the younger man; "but it must not be forgotten, with every desire to be merciful, we have a duty which as citizens we owe to the community, and that obligations are placed upon us by the laws which govern us which cannot always be safely set aside."

"True; but there is no law which prevents a man forgiving another a trespass, rather the contrary."

"Nor should we forget what is, after all, a most important consideration for us," said the other, "the mistaken interpretation which may be given to any act of leniency on our part, and the impression likely to be produced by it on those at present in our employ."

"You are quite right there. It certainly is a most important point for our consideration. But, coming back to the point from which we started, the motive of the man who has written to us, which is most unworthy, and one I don't at all like to encourage; that it is a matter which we have long ago wiped out of our books; for the sake of his dead father's memory, and of the mother whom we have promised to consider as much as possible, I am decidedly of opinion we can very well let the transaction remain as at present, and take no steps to have the man arrested."

"Very well," said the younger man, after a little hesitation. "I'm not quite sure we are doing our duty, but, on the principle that one ought always to give the prisoner the benefit of the doubt, as I am in some little doubt myself, let Sinclair have the benefit of it, and I will agree with you that nothing further be done."

"That being settled, I think it will be best for you, Mr. Gaze, to have the briefest possible letter written to Mr. Barton, thanking him for his communica-

tion, the contents of which have been duly noted, but that no action is contemplated thereon."

The lawyer having taken his leave, a letter was sent to Mrs. Sinclair acquainting her with the decision at which they had arrived, and expressing the pleasure they felt at having been able so far to fall in with her wishes.

When this letter reached Railton Hall, the joy it occasioned none but a mother in similar circumstances can fully realise.

The transition from fear to hope, and again from hope to despair, had been terribly trying to a constitution never strong, and already much enfeebled by the trials it had been called upon to endure.

The tidings which had so unexpectedly reached her, that the son, so long mourned as dead (under circumstances which seemed to leave no room for reasonable doubt of its correctness), was still alive, had filled her with a new-born hope of yet once again looking upon those well-remembered features,—features which bore the unmistakable image of her dead husband,—giving rise to ideals and imaginings which the depths had apparently overwhelmed and shut out from all possibility of realisation.

But such hopes and such visions had been shattered and dispelled as quickly as they had arisen by her visit to Broadstone, and the possible consequences which might result from the intelligence which was there being awaited from the North-West. Woman-like, she had anticipated the worst, and had even allowed her dire apprehensions to manifest their existence in the letter she had written Ralph. She advised—almost entreated—him to escape from Ranger's whilst there was time, lest the officers of justice should be set upon his track, before such a course became impossible.

Once again, however, was hope rekindled in her breast, when the letter arrived which conveyed the welcome intelligence that the firm had abandoned all thoughts of having her son arrested.

Again the reaction from the gloom of despair to the joys of hope was almost more than the poor mother could endure. Scientists tell us that joy never kills. It may be true. At all events its effects are not always as salutary as one could desire, and in Mrs. Sinclair's case it was some time before she could command sufficient strength of will, or obtain the control of her nervous system, to render her capable of dictating a letter to Jennie for her brother, to inform him of the gratifying news.

Her anxiety now was, lest, acting upon the advice given in her previous letter, he should have put into practice the course she had thought it so desirable to urge upon him. It was possible a telegram might reach him in time to arrest his departure; she could scarcely hope to forestall her letter, which had probably already been received and its advice acted upon.

Jennie was, however, instructed to lose no time in sending a "wire" to Ranger's, which ran—"Stay—All right," in the hope that it might produce the effect desired.

The letter which followed was such as only a mother might be expected under the circumstances to write, and was filled with anxious inquiries as to his future intentions.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### MARY TRUMAN.

"... He beheld a vision, and adored the thing he saw."
WORDSWORTH.

Mary Truman, the young woman so suddenly deprived of her only relations by the unfortunate accident on the railway near to M'Lean Station, and whose prospects had been so terribly blighted, had not been an idle spectator at the Ranch of the events which have been transpiring.

With no fixed or clearly defined duties to perform, since her future was still undecided, she was yet able to find occupation in the house and its belongings of a character sufficient to prevent her from having many idle moments.

Naturally of a cheerful disposition, she was wont to be considered the embodiment of good humour "in the old house at home."

A pair of laughing blue eyes, a little "tip-tilted" nose, a *petite* figure, and a mass of rich, wavy auburn hair, added to a saucy expression of countenance, made up an *ensemble* that her all too sensitive, and it may be sensible, cousin had found it impossible to resist.

Her parents were originally in a small way of business at Exeter, but having the misfortune to lose her mother some three weeks after her birth, the father, within a week following the funeral, disappeared, and nothing had been seen or heard of him since.

His brother, who farmed a few acres of land just outside the city, when appealed to, at once came forward, and agreed to adopt the little waif rather than it should be taken charge of by the Union.

When the business was sold, and the debts paid, there remained nearly one hundred pounds, which the uncle very considerately, and with no thought of self, caused to be invested for the child.

At the age of ten the aunt died, after a lingering illness, and in process of time, as the years rolled on, little Mary, besides being the life of the household, became also its presiding deity, and the ruler of all the domestic life and arrangements of the place.

When, therefore, the lease of John Truman's holding expired, and it became a necessity to seek another dwelling, they determined to try their fortunes in the Far West, and of course it was inevitable that Mary should form one of the party.

She felt her physical strength was rapidly returning. The pure dry air,—so notable a feature of the Dominion,—the sunshiny days, and the abundant opportunities for out-door life, had, combined with rare constitutional endowments, contributed in no ordinary degree to that recovery which was every day becoming more manifest.

With the restoration to health there was a corresponding improvement in spirits, as the buoyancy and elasticity of youth asserted their influence, and she began to throw off much of that gloom and depression, so unnatural to the young, and quite foreign to Mary's nature, but which the tragic events with which the swift current of her life had been so suddenly arrested sufficiently accounted for.

The elder Barton had not been unmoved, although a silent spectator of the change that was taking place.

He had witnessed, with a daily increasing interest, her growing health; but it was with even more satisfaction that he marked the improvement in her spirits, as it indicated the arrival of that period when, with some degree of assurance, he might hope to be able to express to her in words the feelings which he had allowed himself to cherish towards her.

Life at the Ranch was uneventful as a rule, and comparatively lonely. Visitors were rare, and the settlers, with their own people, were thrown much together, not only during the hours of labour, but for that companionship which human nature naturally looks for.

The frequent opportunities which such occasions offered for little delicate attentions, kind inquiries, and the like, John was not slow in taking advantage of, nor in noting their effect.

The encouragement which such attentions received was not much; nor could it be regarded as a very safe foundation on which to build hope for the future, yet he did not feel altogether without warrant for so doing.

So when, one evening after the work of the day was over, as the twilight was deepening, and Mary was standing at the entrance to the dairy, watching the stars as they one by one made themselves visible, Barton's approach was all unnoticed until he was close upon her.

"What, star-gazing, my lass?" he exclaimed.

"Well, what if I was, Mr. Impudence," she retorted.

"Oh, nothing," he replied, somewhat at a loss what to say.

"It's a lovely night for star-gazing, as you call it," she added, with a little less asperity in her tones, as if to make amends for the sharpness of her previous retort.

"Haven't seen many better," replied Barton.

"You'd scarcely guess how my thought was then running?"

"If you tell me, I shall know without the trouble."

"I was back in my childhood, and thinking of that sweet little couplet auntie used to repeat so often—

'Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are.'"

"I am sorry that I so rudely broke in upon your reflections. I always turn to the memory of my childhood's happy days with pleasure and satisfaction."

"Bless me, how extremely sentimental we are getting! But I must be going—"

"Stay a moment, Mary, I would like to have a word or two with you, if you can spare a few moments?"

"What impudence, sir!"

"In what way, may I ask?"

"Since when, and by what right, have you taken to address me by my Christian name?" she inquired, with a good-humoured smile.

"It was a liberty, I must confess, but one which I hope my explanation will lead you to pardon."

"Well, if it's going to take long I am afraid I shall not be able to stop and listen."

"I daresay I can manage it in a few words, although it's a subject I have had no previous experience of. Until I saw you, Mary,—for so I must call you until forbidden to do so,—I never set eyes upon the woman I could say I truly loved. But, from the day you first made your appearance amongst us, the feeling has been growing, until I now fully realise you are that other half I need to make my life complete."

"What a very pretty speech. I suppose I ought to feel flattered. For a novice—professing no experience—I think I may say you have accomplished the task charmingly," was Mary's laughing reply.

"Be serious, Mary, there's a dear girl; for it's a serious matter to me."

"Oh well, Mr. Longface, then I'll try. To speak candidly, I've not thought about the matter, and don't want to. So there, you have an answer."

"But not a final answer, I hope?" he added.

"Yes; why not?" she naïvely asked.

"I'd rather you'd say you'll think it over, if what I have said has caused you surprise."

"Surprise? I should think it has! Do you suppose for a moment I was waiting for you to come and tell me what you have?"

"No, Mary," he replied, feeling a little abashed at the thought that he had committed himself by his answer.

"Well then, sir, you had better be content with the answer I have given."

"If you give me credit for sincerity, do you think it possible I can be content with such a reply?" he asked, gazing steadfastly into her half-averted eyes, at the same time attempting to take her hand.

"You are too forward, sir," she exclaimed, as she snatched her hand away.

"Well, take time to think about it, Mary; only give me some little hope.",

"As you please, sir, for I must be going."

"When may I come for my answer—to-morrow?

"Oh, la, no!" she replied; "I shall not be able to make up my mind in that time—that is, if you want a different reply to the one I've given?"

"A week then?" he asked.

"Dear me, how pressing you are! Say a month," she added.

"Don't be so cruel, Mary," he pleaded. "Surely a week is long enough?"

"Well, I'll try what can be done in a week. But mind, I make no promise."

"Good-night, my love! God bless you, and bring you to a right decision," was his reply, as she disappeared into the house.

The stars were twinkling overhead as he made his way to his little shanty, feeling he scarcely knew how, yet strongly tempted to believe that behind the affected gaiety and levity which had been displayed throughout his interview, there was flowing an under-current which might possibly bring him to the haven of his hopes.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### BRIGHTENED HOPES.

"Enough, if something from our hands hath power
To live, and act, and serve the future hour."
WORDSWORTH.

When the telegram arrived, which Mrs. Sinclair had sent in the hope that it might be in time to stay her son from hasty action, there was much rejoicing at the Ranch by all concerned. A load of care and anxiety seemed at once to be lifted, and the course which Fellows had announced his intention of pursuing felt to be fully justified.

All obstacles to future movements being thus removed, it remained to be determined what those movements should be.

If the telegram from his mother conveyed the meaning which he hoped it did, then the way was open for his return to England without any fear of the consequences which might have been expected to attend his so doing.

But what were the prospects which returning held out to him? He had lost his reputation. Under the most favourable conditions he could never expect to be able again to show his face at Broadstone. To be a burden on his doting mother for the remainder of her life was not to be thought of.

He had not been long enough with Ranger to enable him to add much to the little he brought with him on his arrival. Then, added to these reasons, there was the thought of Jessie,—a new factor which had now entered into his life since his arrival at the Ranch, and one which he was not prepared under any circumstances to ignore.

He was willing to be guided by the next letter from home, which the telegram was intended to prepare him for; but in any event he saw, or thought he saw, that it was clearly his best course to stay where he was, and as soon as possible procure a homestead of his own.

Later in the day, when discussing the matter with Ranger, the farmer could not help admitting that it seemed about the only possible thing for him to do.

"And I suppose," said the farmer, "you'll be wanting to make a home of your own as soon as you can, to take Jessie to—eh?"

"That is my next ambition," he replied.

"And a proper one too," was Ranger's rejoinder. "We must see what can be done to get you one."

"Thank you," replied Fellows, "but it need not be hurried over."

"That may be, but if an opportunity offers no time should be lost, as they are soon snapped up."

"Inquiry can be made of the agent when you are next in town to learn what he has on hand."

"I saw to-day, when I was at M'Lean, a holding was for sale which would be likely to fit very well."

"Where was it?" asked Fellows.

"Close to Kinbrae, about eight miles from the Crescent Lake."

"Did you take notice of the particulars concerning it?" said Fellows.

"No, I did not; except that the owner is returning to the Old Country, and wants to sell."

"Well, it might be worth while to inquire about it."

"Yes, I'll do so," replied Ranger.

When the work of the day was over, Fellows lost no time in visiting Jessie at her father's shanty to acquaint her with the receipt of his telegram, in order to relieve her of all fears with regard to the possibility of his being arrested.

The way in which this was likely to affect his future was a question very naturally presenting itself.

"I suppose you will want to return home?" she asked, with just a suspicion of anxiety in her voice.

"No, I think not, Jessie."

"But if your mother desires it?"

"I shall wait and see what she says, but I don't think it will make much difference."

Jessie coloured slightly as she asked, "Why not, Ralph?"

"For two reasons, Jessie," he added. "First, there's your dear little self, whom I could not think of leaving even for mother, much as I should like to see her; then, if I returned I do not know what I should do; and as I have no desire to be a burden to those at home, I have very nearly decided to stay where I am at present."

Not quite knowing how to reply, or what argument to urge against two such weighty reasons, Jessie, as most sensible women would have done under like circumstances, held her tongue without venturing to look up.

Fellows was first to break the silence by saying, "Ranger, who has been more like a father to me than a master, is going to inquire about a homestead, and should the one in view be suitable in every way, I hope soon to be the possessor of a home, to which I shall ask you to accompany me, Jessie."

"But what about father, Ralph? Have you thought of him?"

"Yes, Jess, I have; and my idea is, if he and you are willing, that he should form one of our party,—an arrangement which would give rise to no separation, and he would be very useful."

The conversation having arrived at this point, the entry of Russell himself was looked upon as rather opportune than otherwise, as Fellows at once acquainted him with the subject which was engaging their attention, adding, "Supposing the farmer raises no objection to your going, would you be willing to transfer your services to me and take the management of my farm?"

"Well," he replied, "your proposal is a bit sudden, and I scarcely know what to say about it; but I suppose you don't want a reply at once?"

"Oh no, for I haven't got the farm yet! You had better think about it."

"I'll promise to do that."

"You are perhaps aware that I have very little knowledge of farming beyond what I have picked up during the short time I have been with Ranger, and therefore I shall be obliged to have someone to help me."

"All right, Fellows. So far as I can see at present, I may as well be with you as any other man; more especially as Jess and I will still be near each other."

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### CHARLES BARTON.

"... While thou art one with me,
I seem no longer like a lonely man."—TENNYSON.

Although the autumn was rapidly advancing, and the foliage was fast fleeing from the trees, which lifted sparsely-leaved branches to the Chinook winds which came blowing in fresh from the Pacific, the days were not yet cold.

The Canadians consider autumn the finest season of the year, for then the air is bracing and free from moisture, often for weeks at a time. But the nights are cold,—even in summer they are cool,—so that fires are an early necessity for comfort.

The day of Ranger's visit to M'Lean Station had been singularly fine and sunny, but as the sun went down the wind began to rise, and the air felt cold and chill.

The hardy, stalwart frame of Ranger, however, was not only weather-beaten, but seemed as if it was weather-proof, so that disregarding Mrs. Ranger's cosy-looking fireside, which might have been considered invitingly tempting to a tired man when the work of the day was over, as soon as the usual evening meal was finished he rose, and, buttoning his jacket, announced his intention of going over to Bartons' cabin to have a talk with Charles.

A ten minutes' walk along a devious track brought him near to a little stream, fed from one of the neighbouring hills, beside which the shanty had been pitched.

The Bartons were at home, as a matter of course, there being nothing and nobody to attract them out in such a place after dark.

The elder Barton was engaged reading the immortal allegory of John Bunyan, with which he seemed deeply interested; Charles was quite as much interested, studying a report of some late doings in the Klondyke.

Ranger's entry was a great surprise to both men. They had never before known him to pay a visit, and at such an hour; it was therefore with unfeigned concern they inquired if anything was the matter.

Avoiding a direct answer to the question, he told them, as he seated himself, "I wanted to have a talk with Charles, and I thought we could get on better now than out in the fields by day."

"Your appearance took us so by surprise," replied John, "that——"

"Oh yes, I quite understand," said Ranger. "Well, to shorten matters as much as possible, I have come to ask Charles what made him write that letter to England about Fellows, which he did some weeks ago?"

"What letter?" he asked, turning a fierce look upon the farmer.

"You know the letter I mean well enough."

"No, I don't," he replied, as his eyes fell beneath the steady gaze of Ranger.

"Do you mean to say you did not write to the firm of Quinion, at Broadstone in England, telling them that Fellows was here if they wanted him?"

"How could I do that, when I don't know anything about him?"

"Don't question me, but look straight in my face and say, if you can, 'I did not write it.'"

"I don't know what right you have to talk to me in this manner, Mr. Ranger."

"You are only trying to evade my question, that you know well."

"I can only say, I don't know what you are talking about."

"Then it would be very easy for you to say, 'I never wrote such a letter,' if you did not."

"I don't recognise your right to ask me such a question, and therefore I don't choose to answer."

Ranger felt he was getting roused by the man's prevaricating manner and his attempt at bounce,—for it appeared to him to be nothing else,—but by a strong effort he managed to control himself sufficiently to say—

"Will you tell me whether you have written a letter to Quinion, Broadstone, any time within the last six weeks?"

After waiting a few seconds for the reply which Charles—who sat with his eyes intently gazing into the fire—did not attempt to give, John chimed in with, "Why not say at once, Charles, if you know anything about the matter?"

"I have," he exclaimed after a pause; but the tone in which this was uttered was not one calculated to carry conviction with it.

"You darn'd skunk!" shouted the farmer in wrathful tones; "so you refuse to reply, do you?"

"I refuse to give you any other reply than what you have got."

"Then take this from me," said Ranger, in somewhat softer tones, but yet with a display of a considerable amount of excitement, "the first thing, to-morrow

morning, you pack, and be off from here as quick as you can, for I will not allow such a miserable sneaking hound to remain here in my employ a day longer than I can help."

"You mean it?" said Charles.

"Mean it? I should think I do! Don't you doubt it for one minute," he added, as he brought his fist down with an impressive thump on the table, making the jugs standing on it to quiver.

"This is rather sudden, farmer," broke in John. "What's he going to do when he leaves here?"

"I don't know, and I was going to add, I don't care, but I won't say that; still, that is for him to decide."

"You have used some strong language to my brother, Mr. Ranger; but what it's all about I am quite in ignorance of."

"That I quite believe, John," added Ranger in quieter tones; "that's why I've not included you in anything I've said."

"Can I say or do anything to smooth matters? Tell me what it's all about."

"Ask that coward, he knows well enough, and perhaps will tell you when I'm gone."

"But would it not be better for you to tell me yourself?"

"Don't you interfere, Jack," exclaimed Charles, "as after what that blackguard——"

"Repeat that word, you cur," shouted the farmer angrily, as he advanced upon Charles, "and I'll shake the life out of you! Repeat it, I say, if you dare!"

"I was about to say, when I was stopped, that I should not think of staying now under any circumstances."

"No fear that such a sneak as you have shown yourself to be would be asked."

"I think," broke in John, "it would be as well, Mr. Ranger, if you were now to give me some idea what it all means."

"Well, I'll tell you, John. About two months ago I had a private conversation with Fellows, as we were one evening seated outside the homestead. He and I were supposed to be the only two persons present; but there was another listening, concealed in the bushes, who not only overheard all that was said, but sent a report of our conversation at once to Mr. Quinion, at Broadstone in England."

"How have you learned this?" asked John.

"From Fellows' mother; who upon calling at Broadstone, by her son's request, to acquaint them with incidents known only to myself and him, was surprised to find they were already in possession of the information she had come to bring them."

"Did they say how they had obtained their information?"

"From a correspondent in Canada, who desired that his name might not be made known."

"Well, farmer, how do you fix my brother with the writing of that letter?"

"That's my matter," replied Ranger. "You ask that pale-faced hound over there, and let him deny doing so, if he can, without prevaricating."

It must be admitted that Ranger was playing "high." He was by no means certain of the ground he had taken up. But, feeling pretty confident in his own mind that the knowledge which had escaped had been obtained by Charles, in the manner indicated, he was determined to see if the fellow could be "bluffed" into an admission of his guilt.

Up to the present the attempt had not proved successful, although from the man's manner, and the assumption of indignation, which sat very ill upon him, and which the shrewd farmer thought he could see through, he felt more than ever confirmed in his opinion that the man was guilty.

After Ranger had left, the two men sat silent for some time, smoking, and occupied with their own thoughts.

John felt the position was an awkward one. His brother had been practically dismissed. Where was he to go? What could he do to avert it? He knew his brother's ways too well, and was conscious that it would be no easy task to manage him. But time was pressing, and it was of the utmost importance that whatever was decided upon should be promptly and vigorously carried out.

The silence, which was becoming painful, was at length broken by John, who, laying down his pipe, and turning to his brother, said, "This is a rather unpleasant wind-up to our expectations, Charley?"

Receiving no reply from Charles, who sat moodily gazing into the fire, he continued, "We've been together now ever since we were babies, and although there will come a time when we must be separated, it does seem a pity that out here it should have to take place in such a manner."

"Well, who's to blame?" asked Charles savagely.

"You heard what Ranger said?"

"And of course you believe him?"

"I don't say that I do. I want to hear your version of his story."

"You heard what I said also?"

"That amounted to nothing. You had better have told him you had not written the letter."

"Why should I? What right had he to ask such a question?"

"It would have been so easy, and would have no doubt put an end to the matter."

"Don't you believe it. That man had come with his mind made up, and any denials on my part would have been of no avail."

"It would have put him to the proof of his statement, at all events; and we should have known better the value to attach to it."

After a short pause, John added, "Well, Charley, I am sorry to be obliged to confess it, but from the way in which you avoid the question, I am beginning to be of the opinion there must be some truth in Ranger's charge. Tell me candidly, did you write that letter?"

"Don't you bother your head about what you have nothing to do with."

"It *is* something I have to do with. You are my brother, and we are the only remaining members of a once united and happy family. Anything that affects your honour or happiness equally affects mine, and I hope you feel the same towards myself. If we are to be separated,—as seems very probable,—don't let it be in anger. If you will give me the assurance that Ranger is mistaken, and that you did not write the letter, I'll believe you."

"It's a question that neither you nor Ranger have any right to ask. I shall give no further answer. You may both think what you like, and do as you like. I shall answer no more questions."

Rising abruptly, as if to put an end to what was clearly an unpleasant topic of conversation, he retired to his room, leaving John to ruminate alone upon the difficulties which lay before him.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### TO FRESH FIELDS.

"All about him shadows still."—TENNYSON.

The Bartons were early on the move the next morning, and Charles was soon busily engaged arranging and packing, ready for departure.

"Then you mean to go, Charley?" asked John, anxious to say something.

"Of course I mean to go! Didn't Ranger tell me to?"

"I know that; but I thought you might have made up your mind, after sleeping upon the subject, to go and explain matters and put things straight."

"Not likely, John! I wouldn't stay here now if he was to ask me."

"I'm very sorry to hear it, for you may travel a long way before meeting with another man who will be as kind and considerate of his men as Ranger is."

"I don't feel that I have much to thank him for."

"Ah, you are prejudiced at present."

"I don't think so,—I speak as I feel."

"Yes, yes! But, mark my words, you'll make a different statement before long."

"We shall see!" Then, after a pause, he asked, "I suppose, John, you will be able to drive me and my luggage over to M'Lean Station?"

"I don't suppose there will be much difficulty about that,—we are not busy now. But where do you think of going?"

"I shall go for Maple Creek first. There I shall make inquiries, and have a good look round. If I can't find anything there, I shall go on to Calgary, which is a busy city, where I think I am pretty sure to succeed."

"Yes, I should think it about as good an arrangement as you could make."

"I am only sorry, John, you are not going with me; I should have been glad for us to have continued together."

"So am I, Charley. You can't tell how I feel your going."

"Well, it is not too late now, if you have a mind to make one with me. I should be very glad if you would, John."

It was the first time he had appeared to evince any feeling at the prospect of parting, and it moved his brother deeply. But his reply was calmly and unhesitatingly given—

"It's no use, my boy; however much I might have liked to, it's too late now!"

"What do you mean by too late?"

"I was on the point of letting you into a secret last night, when Ranger came, and then the 'rumpus' with him upset all my little plan."

"What was it?" inquired Charles, with some astonishment.

"Why, nothing more nor less than that I am going to get married, as soon as I can properly fix up matters."

"Never! Who are you going to marry?"

"I am only waiting for Mary Truman's answer, which she has promised in about another week."

"Then it is not yet settled?"

"No, not quite," he replied rather solemnly.

"Well, you know 'there's many a slip'——"

"Yes, I am aware of all that, but I don't anticipate one here."

"But if she does—shall you stay on?"

"No, not I!"

"In that case you could then come on and join me, so I'll take care to let you have my address. But there, John, I hope you'll be more successful than I have been."

"You don't mean to say that you have already proposed and been refused by Mary?" asked John anxiously.

"No, no! not by her, but Jessie Russell."

"Oh, she's going to have Fellows! Didn't you know that?"

"I did not know it, but I thought so," he replied, as a fierce light gleamed in his eyes.

"You've kept your little affair very quiet," was John's sly rejoinder.

"It's not a pleasant experience to talk about," he added. "It makes, however, another reason why I am not sorry at having to leave the place."

"I'm sorry for you, Charley, my boy; but I think she'll get a good husband in Fellows."

"I'm not so sure about that. My advice to you is, be careful about him."

"Why! what do you mean?"

"He's a man I should trust only as far as I could see him."

"Know anything against him?"

"Don't ask me any more questions."

The subject was dropped, and Charles went on with his packing, whilst John went over to the Ranch to acquaint the farmer with his intention of driving Charles to town.

There was no difficulty in arranging this, and Ranger having paid him the wages due to Charles, together with a month's salary in lieu of notice, in order that he might have something to go on with, he returned and prepared for the journey before him.

After spending about a week at Maple Creek,—a small but flourishing township, contiguous to the Crane Lake, from whence a distant view of the Cypress Hills in the South may be obtained,—and finding nothing offering to suit him, Charles Barton determined to proceed on to Calgary, which lies about seventy miles east of the "Rockies."

Calgary is laid out at the juncture of two rivers,—the Bow and the Elbow,—and is a busy trade centre for nearly all the ranching districts of Southern Alberta; and as the Calgary and Edmonton branches unite here with the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway, it is rapidly becoming a large and important emporium for the trade of the North-West Provinces. Its edifices and public buildings are sound and substantial; whilst its churches, hotels, stores, and factories, give ample evidence of the successful nature of its business prospects. It has a population exceeding four thousand people, but the stream of settlers is so continuous in its direction, and the reputation which this province enjoys is so good, that it will certainly not be very long before these figures are largely exceeded.

The second day after his arrival at Calgary, Barton fell in with a stockman belonging to a large and thriving rancher in the locality, by whom he was taken in hand, and offered a position at one and a quarter dollars a day, which was accepted, so that for a time his troubles were at an end.

Barton's departure from the Ranch—where incidents of importance were not matters of common occurrence—was scarcely to be classed as a nine-days' wonder. His morose and taciturn disposition, which had kept him aloof from his mates, had brought him few friends; they were acquaintances, and that was all. No one was found regretting him, and but few missed him. Here and there, the brother was asked, "What's become of Charles?" but it was more for the sake of John himself than for the one who had gone. To one who did venture the additional inquiry, "Where's he gone too?" the reply was, "to Maple Creek or Calgary, whichever appears most suitable and promising."

John, however, missed him; which after all was but natural.

They were brothers, and had never been separated for a quarter of a century.

Charles had been but poor company for John, but it is not always the most talkative that are regarded as the choicest company, and John felt lonely now he was gone.

When he learned that he was safely and comfortably settled at Calgary, he was pleased, and after a time became more reconciled to the change; especially in the contemplation of another change which he hoped soon to be making himself.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### KINBRAE.

"And thou hast also tempted here to rise,
'Mid sheltering pines, this cottage rude and grey."
WORDSWORTH.

With the arrival of the English mail came the expected letter from Mrs. Sinclair, conveying the welcome news to Fellows, which her telegram had prepared him for, that the Broadstone firm had decided to take no action upon the information supplied them about himself.

It also expressed the mother's great desire to see him; but he was urged to act as his circumstances might suggest. If he decided to come home, she would see that he did not want; but as her income was limited, she would not be able to supply him with pocket-money; and unless he saw his way to obtaining employment in England, it would not be wise to disturb present arrangements, if they were favourable. In his next letter, he was to be sure and inform her fully with

regard to his position and prospects.

The decision at which he had practically arrived was only confirmed and strengthened by the receipt of this letter.

By the same mail the letter which the Broadstone solicitors had been instructed to send, came addressed to Charles at the Ranch.

Seeing, by the printed address on the envelope, that it was from a firm of solicitors at Broadstone, what had been but suspicions before were now regarded as facts,—that it was Charles who had overheard the conversation between Ranger and Fellows, and had at once communicated with Broadstone. There was nothing else that the brother knew of, which could bring him into correspondence with such a place as Broadstone.

"Look at that," said the farmer, as he handed the letter to John to be forwarded; "if anything was wanted to confirm the charge I made against your brother, is not that good proof?"

"It certainly looks like it," replied John, in a disgusted tone.

"Yes; and to play with words, as he did, up to the very last," added Ranger, "rather than try to undo the mischief he had been aiming at."

"I feel it very sorely, Ranger, he being my own brother; more especially when I remember that nearly his last words to me were a caution to beware of Fellows. I am quite at a loss to understand what he could have been dreaming about."

The letter, when it reached Charles, in no way tended to increase his happiness. He saw, only when it was too late, what a fool he had been. He had gained nothing, and had lost a good situation, besides being separated from a brother for whom he felt a very strong affection, although he may have had a queer way of showing it.

He would gladly have recalled the act, could he have done so, since it had involved him in its consequences; but no thought of reparation to the wronged ever entered his narrow mind.

Fellows—who now felt himself partially, at all events, re-habilitated—was anxious that the procuring of a home, to which he might be able to take the woman he was looking forward to making his wife, should not be delayed.

He had still another object in view. He had resolved, that if his efforts were attended with success, to invest his savings, in order to repay the firm the moneys belonging to them, which he had misappropriated. He had written a very full and penitential letter, informing them of his intention, and therefore he was desirous that no time might be lost. Ranger, who was a man of the highest integrity, commended him for his desire, and promised to aid him in every possible way.

Two days later, in pursuance of his promise, Ranger took Fellows with him into town, that together they might learn some particulars of Kinbrae, which was

known to be in the market, and to see what other holdings were to be had.

Kinbrae was a small settlement some ten or twelve miles south-east of Crescent Lake, near to the head-waters of a tributary stream flowing into the Qu'Appelle River, after pursuing a fairly straight course for about fifty miles.

The holding was one of one hundred and sixty acres, on which a well-built homestead had been erected, together with most of the buildings needed for carrying on the work of a farm. The owner, Dennis Crowley, on the death of his wife, three years previously, had, with his two sons, young men of eighteen and nineteen respectively, left their home in County Kerry, Ireland, to try their fortunes in the Far West.

With little experience to guide them, they had just managed to exist during the three years they had been in possession; and, having frittered away the small capital they possessed, were now only anxious to clear out and return, with whatever they might succeed in realising on the sale of their stock.

In a state of society such as that which prevails amidst the boundless prairies of the North-West, however favourable the circumstances may be,—and that they are *most* favourable there is abundant testimony to prove,—there are sure to be some who will go to the wall. Like the men in other stratas of society, who, although they may be placed in positions of affluence to-day in a little while will be found grovelling amid scenes of penury and want, they seem to lack the secretive and acquisitive qualities which the more successful possess, and they fail. But the fault is never with themselves, it is their misfortune—at least, so they tell us!

This was Crowley's case, and the reason given for wishing to dispose of his holding. At the suggestion of Ranger, it was determined to ride over and view the place, but there was not time to do this at present.

The following week, however, when work was not quite so pressing, and their services could more readily be dispensed with, a day was selected, and, making an early start, they reached Kinbrae soon after midday.

The buildings were substantial, commodious, and in fairly good condition, but the so-called stock was poor in the extreme. The farming utensils were ill-conditioned and of little value; and the household furniture, which scarcely included the barest necessities, was rudely constructed, of the roughest material, and possessed no features of attractiveness. Three horses, five steers, two dogs, and one cat, constituted the live stock. About thirty acres had been under cultivation, but nothing had been done since the late harvest to prepare the land for the next.

Crowley—who originally had been asking three hundred pounds for the holding as it stood—was willing now to take almost any offer that would enable him to get away.

Ranger was well satisfied with the position of the location, and the prospects it held out, and had no hesitation in advising Fellows to offer two hundred pounds down, which, after a very little demur, was accepted, with option of possession within a month.

The farmer was pleased with the future which appeared to be opening for Fellows, notwithstanding it would be at some considerable sacrifice to himself.

The services of Barton he could well dispense with, but those of Fellows, and Russell in addition, would be a serious depletion of his working staff, which it might be a work of time efficiently to replace.

He, however, felt he had done no more than was his duty. It was the correct thing to do. And he had no fears that he would come out all right in the end.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### JOHN AND MARY.

"I will hereupon confess, I am in love."

*Love's Labours Lost*, Act I. sc. ii.

Barton's duties at the Ranch were of such a nature, that he was seldom to be seen in the neighbourhood of the house during the daytime; for the most part he was out on the prairie, attending to the cattle, of which Ranger had now a pretty considerable stock.

Mary Truman's attention was chiefly devoted to the dairy, which of late had quite outgrown the powers of Mrs. Ranger, and she was only too glad to avail herself of the assistance which Mary was very willing and quite competent to render.

The two had but few opportunities of seeing each other; and during the week which was to elapse, according to arrangement, before the reply he had asked her for was to be given, they had seen nor heard nothing of one another.

Mary had learned from Mrs. Ranger of the departure of Charles, and the circumstances which had brought that event about.

Whatever may have been her feelings for John, she had no sympathy with Charles, and felt, in common with others, no pang of regret when told he had gone.

With the exception of his brother, the man seemed to have left not a friend behind him.

Mary kept herself as much in the house as possible, as though carefully bent upon putting obstacles in the way of any accidental meeting between herself and John.

The week, however, was barely out, when the anxious swain, eager to know his fate, and unwilling to brook delay, made his appearance at the dairy door, at the close of the day, to inquire if Mary was too busy to see him.

She herself was nowhere to be seen, but Mrs. Ranger chanced to be standing at the door, and to her he addressed his inquiry.

[image]

*MARY WAS NOWHERE TO BE SEEN, BUT MRS. RANGER CHANCED TO BE STANDING AT THE DOOR.*

"Mary has just gone upstairs," replied Mrs. Ranger. "Shall I tell her you want her?"

Barton hesitated for a moment, scarcely knowing what reply to make, till at last, with a confused smile, he stammered out, "Yes, do please."

Going to the foot of the stairs which led to the rooms above, Mrs. Ranger called, "Mary! here's John wants to see you. Shall I tell him to wait?"

"Oh, tell him I can't come at present," was the reply, which was plainly heard by those in the room below.

"Is he to wait?"

"No; please tell him I can't be bothered to-night."

On her return, John remarked, "I heard what the young lady said, and I suppose I must be content with that for my answer."

"Is it anything you want, John, that I can do for you?" asked Mrs. Ranger, with a good-humoured smile.

"No, I think not—at least, I know you can't," he added, quickly correcting himself.

"Do you care to wait then?" she inquired.

"No; I daresay I shall see her before long,—I should be sorry to bother her."

Following him to the door, as he was leaving, she whispered, "I think I can see what's brewing. Now, don't be offended if I offer you a bit of advice. I have had some experience, and seen a little of life, and have some knowledge of the ways of my own sex. Don't be too ready to take a woman at her word. Just remember, she doesn't always mean all she says. You see what I mean, I think? No offence. Good-night."

It was with very mixed feelings that John returned to his solitary dwelling.

He had considerable confidence in Mrs. Ranger, as a shrewd, common-sense woman, yet he hesitated to place full reliance upon her judgment. She no doubt meant well, and spoke as she did with a desire to reassure him. But he felt sorely puzzled to account for Mary's unwillingness to see him. Experience he had none; he had learned nothing in that school. He had but just entered as a pupil, and the first lesson was now being studied.

Books had been his only tutors, and the few he had read had imparted theories which opportunity had not enabled him to test.

Men with a wider knowledge, and a deeper insight into the mysteries of the female mind, could have told him that Mary's unwillingness to see him, and her brusque—it might even be rude—message, were favourable rather than unfavourable auguries of what was likely to be the nature of her reply.

But he had no one he could draw inspiration from. Imagination was therefore allowed to run riot, and the most unfavourable result anticipated, rather than the sensible advice of Mrs. Ranger being allowed to have its way.

Before retiring for the night, he had so far overcome his scruples—or shall we rather call them doubts?—as to resolve that he would make another effort on the morrow to see her, and learn the fate that was in store for him.

When Mary joined the couple in the sitting-room below, some ten to fifteen minutes later, there was a mischievous gleam in her sparkling eyes, and slightly nervous but mirthful twitching about the corners of her pretty lips, which betrayed the humour she had been indulging at the expense of her love-sick swain.

A broad smile was upon Ranger's face, but his wife, looking up from the work she had in hand, merely remarked, "Mary, I could not help noticing how disappointed John seemed with your message."

"Indeed? I don't see why he should be," was Mary's reply, in a tone of assumed ignorance which was far from deceiving the older couple.

"He said he should be sorry to bother you, but he had no doubt he should see you before long."

"Will he! Perhaps he may or he may not." Then, after a brief pause, she asked, as though anxious the subject should not be dropped, "Did he say what he wanted me for?"

"Not likely, child! Did you imagine he would?"

"I never took the trouble to think. Why should he not? I have no secrets!"

"Are you sure, Mary?" asked Mrs. Ranger, looking round at her with a comical kind of questioning glance.

"Oh, dear me, yes!" she replied.

"Well, I think I had very little difficulty in reading John's secret, which I imagine is not much of a secret to you."

"I suppose, if I cared to take the trouble, I might guess what brought him

here to-night."

"No doubt of it, my dear."

"And I don't know any reason why I should hesitate to tell you. The fact is," she added, "a week ago he asked me if I would be his wife."

"And what did you tell him?"

"That it was a subject I had not thought about, and did not want to."

"Of course that was all quite true, Mary?"

"I daresay it was," she replied; "at all events, it was as true as most of the things said under such circumstances are."

"Did the answer satisfy him?"

"Oh, dear no!" she replied, with a laugh. "He wanted a reply in a week."

"And you promised to give it?"

"No, I did not! I told him if he wanted a different answer to the one I had given, he must let me have a month to consider it."

"Well, and what then?"

"On his pressing me to be, as he termed it, more reasonable, and to let him know in a week, I promised that I would try what could be done in the time."

"And so he came to receive your answer tonight—which you were not prepared to give. Is that it?"

"My opinion is," answered Mary, "that a woman gains nothing by making herself too cheap."

"Well, it's a serious matter, my child, and one not to be trifled with," Mrs. Ranger added seriously.

"Yes, I know; but really I cannot help laughing when I see what long faces the men put on if they want to tell a woman they love her."

"Well, that may be because they feel how very serious are the consequences of such an act."

"Bother the seriousness! I don't believe that enters into their minds. They are too frequently wondering what sort of figure they will cut if the woman or girl should happen to say 'No' to them."

"That's not the case with all of them."

"It may not be, but it is with most of them."

"I'm afraid you are rather cynical, Mary."

"Well, I can't help it if I am."

"And I don't think you care much for poor John."

"To tell the downright truth," added Mary, "I don't think I do, either."

"Then, regardless of the man's feelings, don't say yes to him unless you feel you can love him."

"That's why I want more time," she replied a little more soberly. Then, after reflecting for a while, she continued, "You know, when I came out here it was with

the intention of marrying my cousin; and but for the sad accident which befell us, I should in all probability by this time have been Joe's wife. The change was so sudden, and his loss comparatively so recent, that really I have scarcely had time to get over it, and to examine the state of my own feelings thoroughly."

"I can quite believe you, my dear," was Mrs. Ranger's motherly comment.

"Candidly," she went on, "I do not dislike the man, but I cannot say that I love him; and unless I can bring myself to do that, I shall certainly act upon your advice and not say yes."

"Quite right, so far," said Mrs. Ranger; "but your duty now is, not to refuse to see John, nor to play too much with honest love, but to tell him what you have told us; and if he cares for you, as I believe he does, he will see the reasonableness of your request, and be prepared to wait. At all events, try him."

"Well, perhaps I will. I think very likely the next time he comes I'll act upon your advice."

The farmer, who had listened with interest to the conversation which had been carried on by the two women, seeing they were on the point of leaving him, ventured to add, "And I think you have come to a very sensible conclusion."

"But please, Mr. Ranger," exclaimed Mary, "I hope you will not mention any portion of our conversation to John, if you should see him."

"Trust me for that, my girl," he replied. "I shall leave him to fight his own battle; and you may reckon that what has been said to-night is safe in my keeping."

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### PREPARATIONS.

"The food of hope is meditated action."—WORDSWORTH.

Fellows—or rather Sinclair, as we may now call him, since all necessity for concealment of identity had passed—was not free from some little excitement whenever he reflected upon the change which he contemplated so soon making in his position.

He had not forgotten those at home at "Railton." Ralph had written a long letter to his mother, giving a full account of his Jessie—the wedding that was in prospect—and the home he hoped to have the happiness so soon of taking her to.

She lost nothing from his description of her personal charms; and her char-

acter and conduct, and everything that affected her, were so graphically and faithfully delineated, that to the mother's imagination she appeared a paragon of all the virtues.

He expressed sincere and heartfelt regret that his mother and sister could not be present to take part in the celebration of what must be regarded as the event of his life.

It was a source of much satisfaction to Mrs. Sinclair thus to learn of her son's progress and happiness. But occurring so far from home, in a land to which she was an entire stranger, and under circumstances which she was only able but dimly to realise, the event which, had it happened at home, would have been a joy to anticipate and prepare for, and a more than "nine-days' wonder" to talk about, was shorn of much of that exciting interest a mother might naturally be expected to feel at the coming marriage of her only son.

Her congratulations and good wishes, with such maternal counsel as seemed to her only fitting, were at once put into a letter and posted, that it might reach him before his wedding-day should have passed.

Crowley had been informed by Sinclair that he would be prepared to complete the contract entered into, and to take possession at the end of the third week; which had been assented to.

It was Sinclair's intention to spend a week or so at "Kinbrae," seeing that everything was prepared for the "home-coming," which it was contemplated should be at the end of the month.

Russell had arranged to quit his shanty also, a week before, in order to help Sinclair as much as possible; and during that last week Jessie was to be the guest of Mrs. Ranger, who, woman-like, was full of excitement at the prospect.

From time to time much animation prevailed at the Ranch. Silks and satins were not expected to be in evidence, but the women were busy putting little mysterious touches to dresses and hats, and adding pieces of finery when obtainable, so as to mark the occasion, which was a new experience, yet one which it would never do to allow to pass without a decent show being made.

The wedding was to take place at the homestead, and a parson from the town had been arranged with to come over and "hitch-on" the couple.

The day was to be observed as a holiday for the hands, and all were to be invited to the wedding-feast.

Ralph and Jessie had to endure a deal of rough, but good-humoured, chaff during the intervening period.

Society in the Far West, at the time of which we write, was not that unsophisticated and half-civilised agglomeration of human beings which before the advent of the Pacific Railway was to be found in the isolated and sometimes sparsely-populated settlements dotted about the prairie, or away up in the back-

woods, remote from the haunts of men. Facilities for improved transit had created growing towns and cities, and the influx of the stranger from many lands had given rise to wants which traders found it their interest to meet.

The ubiquitous representatives of the great emporiums in the "States," as of the large commercial houses of the foreigner from across the seas, were indefatigable in pushing the wares of the firms they were commissioned to represent; not only supplying, but contributing largely to sustain a demand their energy had done so much to create.

With the exception of some few of the labourers on the Ranch, the whole of Ranger's people might be described as belonging to the upper strata of the working classes.

Sinclair himself—before his fall—was not what would be generally defined as a working-man. The working-men would be the first to resent his inclusion in their ranks, whilst those resembling Ralph would not be over-eager to claim the doubtful privilege. Since his arrival at the Ranch he had found it necessary to step down, and don the appearance, as well as join in the tasks of, the working-man.

Humiliated, as he already felt himself to be, by his past career, this was no hardship, for he knew that if he had received the due reward of his deeds, he would probably now be working out a sentence of imprisonment, only to emerge, it might be, as a hardened ruffian, further to prey upon society; or else to take his place with the lowest dregs of a society which the honest working-class look down upon, sometimes with pity but too often with contempt.

On the day the contract for "Kinbrae" was to be settled, Ranger rode over with Sinclair and Russell to the neighbourhood of the Crescent Lake to complete the transaction.

Crowley was ready for them on their arrival. His luggage, and such things as he intended to take with him, had been packed, and carted to Bredenbury the previous day, for transmission by a branch of the Pacific Railway running from Yorkton, until it unites with the main line a short distance east of Winnipeg. The stock having been inspected, the business was soon completed, and wishing the homeward voyagers farewell, the three men were left in possession of "Kinbrae."

Besides the stock, there was one farm-hand—a youth of about seventeen, employed by Crowley, who had consented to remain with the new owner.

When Ranger had left, the two men set out on a general tour of inspection.

"It strikes me, Russell, that fellow Crowley, who has just gone back home, must have been a very lazy chap to be willing to part with such a capital location as this is for the money he did!"

"I don't understand him at all, sir," said Russell, as they walked over the fields, and through the rich grasses of much that was still untouched prairie-land. "He appears to have done very little. There has not been more than about

thirty acres under cultivation all the time he was here."

"I suppose he must have run out his capital, and left nothing to buy stock with."

"I daresay that was about it. He probably sent all he raised the first season to market, or nearly all, and the quantity for the next harvest was so small that he never recovered."

"What I think of doing is, to try and get about fifty acres under wheat for next harvest. We ought to be able to manage that."

"Yes, with some little additional labour, which I daresay can be hired in town."

"What's the distance into town?" inquired Sinclair.

"I think the nearest is Church Bridge, about seven miles; the next is Bredenbury, which is about two miles farther."

"I'll see to it to-morrow," he added.

The week that elapsed prior to the event which all were looking forward to was a busy one for Sinclair and his two companions.

The house, with its farm-buildings, although sound and in a fairly good condition, had been sadly neglected, and needed a considerable amount of attention to render them clean and presentable and worthy of their new tenant.

The waggons and carts wanted repairing,—nuts were missing, bolts were loose, damaged spokes required replacing, and loosened tyres demanded skilled handling.

Harness was not much better: where buckles had fled, cord or thong had been substituted; broken straps were found pieced together with string; and, in fact, every contrivance seemed to have been adopted to patch or conceal a flaw rather than spend a penny on a necessary repair.

Agricultural implements were in a like shady condition; many being cast aside as valueless which a trifling outlay would easily restore to utility again.

The easy, negligent, and happy-go-lucky disposition of the Irishman was so stamped on all around, that, had he not already known it, it would have been a comparatively easy matter to have arrived at the conclusion, from the condition in which things had been left, that the last tenant must have been one of Erin's sons.

At the Ranch, Mrs. Ranger, with the two women, were fully employed, or so they thought they were, and endeavoured to impress everyone else with their own belief that they were. And if the difficulty experienced in getting a plain answer to an ordinary question might be regarded as some proof of the truth of the representation, there was abundant evidence of the fact from that source alone.

Ranger was about the only person who seemed to be unmoved by pending

events. To judge from the equanimity of his temper, and the apparent unconcern manifested at all that was transpiring, or the little heed he gave to the flurry and excitement in the house, one might well have supposed him to be entirely engrossed with the cares of the farm and the duties which its out-door work involved.

Jessie, as the prospective chief actor in the coming ceremony, was anything but an unmoved spectator of what was taking place.

Possessing, however, considerable powers of self-control to the outward observer, there was little to mark the deep feelings of excitement working within, which only by a vigorous effort she was able at all to repress.

Until Sinclair made his appearance at the Ranch, followed shortly afterwards by the Bartons, she had seen very few of the male sex, except the labourers from time to time hired for the season by Ranger, with the appearance of none of whom had she been in the least favourably impressed. Her father and Ranger were her only male companions, if we except the youth called Tom, who was generally looked upon as a little "daft," and a common "butt" for everyone.

In the person of Ralph Sinclair, her woman's ready wit had been quick to discover a man of more than ordinary intelligence, capable of noble actions from honourable motives. Well-formed, and strongly-built, with a pair of dark, thoughtful-looking eyes beneath a broad, high forehead, his appearance won her admiration,—-a sentiment, circumstance, or feeling, known only to herself, and carefully hidden within the treasury of her own breast. But the feeling of admiration was not allowed long to sit solitary. It gathered strength, and rapidly developed into a warmer and more tender emotion, which the teaching of her sex, as well as her own natural modesty, would not allow her to confess to.

The attention given during the period of his illness and convalescence but tended to strengthen and confirm the feeling she had been led to cherish, adding volume and power to the influences which had been so forcibly working to prepare the way for an all too easy conquest.

The revelation of Ralph's delinquencies came at first as a great blow to her, as it threatened to rob her idol of some of the sterling qualities she had in her imagination invested him with. Quickly recovering from its effects she allowed her affections to centre on him with all the ardour of which her nature was capable, so that now she was contemplating marriage as the crown of true

womanhood and the commencement of a useful and a happy life.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### "TILL DEATH DO US PART."

"That man ... who shall report he has
A better wife, let him in naught be trusted."
*Henry VIII.*, Act II. sc. iv.

Since his last rebuff, John Barton had been vainly seeking an opportunity of meeting Mary Truman alone.

Her efforts to avoid him had been persistent and successful; but whether dictated by a spirit of mischief, which finds delight in tantalising the ardent swain, or from a mere desire to enjoy a little flirtation,—by some designated "harmless," but which at the best is dangerous and should be discouraged by the sex,—Barton felt at a loss to determine. Shakespeare says—

"... Where love reigns, disturbing Jealousy
Doth call himself Affection's sentinel."

But as there did not happen to be a second possible candidate for Mary's favours at present on the Ranch, there was an entire absence of employment for such a guard. That was a foe of whom he had no dread.

The week prior to the coming wedding, Mrs. Ranger had determined to spend a day in town, making some necessary purchases; Tom was accordingly ordered to have the buggy ready early on the day the farmer had agreed to drive her in.

When Barton heard this, he thought he saw the opportunity offering he had been waiting for. Leaving the fields sooner than usual, he marched straight up to the house, where he had the good fortune to find Mary seated alone.

"At last, Mary!" he said.

"What's at last?" she asked quite innocently.

"Why, do you know how hard I've tried to see you, and what a many times you have refused me."

"Well, why keep on coming? I'm sure I never asked you to."

"You know why, Mary."

"You seem in a dreadful hurry," she added sharply.

"Not so much in a hurry, Mary, as anxious to know your answer."

"I'd much rather you were not so pressing," she replied.

"But you promised to let me have your reply to my question in a week."

"No! I only promised to see what I could do in that period, when you urged that a month was too long a time to take for consideration. There are circumstances which alter cases, you know."

"Do such circumstances exist in my case?" he asked.

"Yes, I think they do," she replied, a little nervous tremor visible in her tone.

"I'm sorry if it is so."

"Besides, I'm not at all anxious to give up my liberty," she added laughingly.

"I don't ask you to be my slave, Mary, but my wife," he replied with some emphasis.

"And in too many instances there is little difference between the two states."

"Perhaps that is too true. And my difficulty is how to convince you that it will not be so in your case, if I can help it."

"Every man is good at promising, and you know the homely proverb about 'Promises being like pie-crust'?"

"Do I look like a deceiver, Mary?"

"I'm sure I can't tell—I've not seen enough of you to know."

"Is that one of the circumstances which you said altered cases?"

"Well—yes; or if it isn't it ought to be, as it's a matter of some importance."

"What are the other circumstances you referred to?" he inquired.

"Well, I suppose you have not forgotten that when I came out here it was with the intention of being married to one of my cousins, who was with us?"

"No, I remember that. It was a dreadful loss, which must have deeply affected you. But regrets for the past should not be allowed to mar all future happiness."

"I know. Time is said to heal all wounds, but the length of time is not stated."

"I was hoping, Mary, you had recovered from the effects by now."

"The scars left by deep wounds are not easily forgotten."

"And such a wound never need be forgotten."

"All very fine now, Mr. Barton," replied Mary. "Seriously, I do not feel able so soon to give you an answer. The loss and disappointment to me are yet too recent; I have seen so little of you (or you of me), and have given the subject so little thought, that I am not prepared to say what I may be willing to do."

"Well, tell me, Mary, there's a dear girl, in all seriousness, what you wish in the matter, and I will try to make your wishes my law." It must, however, in justice be stated that the question was asked in such a mournful tone, and the assurance

given with such a degree of hesitation, that it looked exceedingly doubtful if all that was said was really meant, or that the promise was one which would be kept.

"Since you really want to know my wishes——"

"I do, Mary!" he interrupted.

"Well, don't be so impatient, sir, and I'll try and tell you. My wish is that you press for no answer for six months, during which time we shall be able to meet as friends and become better acquainted with each other, when it may happen that friendship will not improve upon acquaintance; in which case, no harm will be done, as we shall each be able to take our own course, and be saved many useless regrets."

"Your conditions are hard, Mary, but I can't say they are unjust; nor am I afraid of the result you foreshadow."

"In that case, the subject can be again resumed. In the meanwhile, let's agree to leave the future to look after itself."

"If I thought there was any chance of your relenting, Mary, I would try and urge you——"

"Then please don't," she interrupted, "for it will not be the slightest use."

This was said with so much of resolution and determination in the tone, that Barton, seeing it would be useless to press his wishes further, reluctantly consented to the arrangement proposed.

During the interval, as stipulated, Barton had frequent opportunities of converse with Mary, the result being to bring out more clearly the fact that there was an affinity of souls between them which paved the way for that union of hearts which, when the six months had expired, and he renewed his request, was confirmed by a union of hands, with the usual formula—"*till death do its part.*"

* * * * *

The wedding of Jessie Russell with Fellows was celebrated at the time fixed, amid general merry-making. The company was not a large one, comprising, as it did, besides the chief actors, only the few work-people in Ranger's service—in all some fourteen persons.

When the ceremony was over, and the feasting had been vigorously started, Ralph drove away for Kinbrae with his smiling bride, followed by the hearty cheers and good wishes of all.

THE END

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